

BRO, LISA WENGER, Ph.D. *Strange Changes: Cultural Transformation in U.S. Magical Realist Fiction*. (2008)
Directed by Dr. Scott Romine. 274 pp.

The focus of my dissertation is recent U.S. magical realism, more precisely, the cultural-ideological role the magic plays as a technique or effect fiction writers use to describe particular transformations characters undergo. Since critics have repeatedly identified the magic within the broader zone of postmodern and postcolonial writing, a first step will involve reexamining the complex relationships of magical realism with the postmodern and the postcolonial in American and international context. Coming to terms with the dynamic of the three terms and related literary-cultural practices will help understanding why and how American writers of the past decades have been using magical realism to suggest how human beings go through a restructuring process wherein beliefs they hold are reassessed and reformed, that is, how the magic acts as a cultural agent. Indeed, as my project will show, not only does the magic open up new possibilities and worlds for the characters; it also allows for the reformation of longstanding beliefs. Through this process, we see characters wrestle with and adopt new ideologies, often gaining strength as a result.

STRANGE CHANGES: CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN
U.S. MAGICAL REALIST FICTION

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2008

Approved by

Committee Chair

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To my wonderful husband, Jeremy Bro,
who spent endless hours listening to me talk about my dissertation,
letting me bounce ideas off him,
listening to all my dissertation woes,
and pouring me copious amounts of wine when things just weren't going my way.
Hopefully, the years of stress, meltdowns, and breakdowns have paid off!

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By and large, magical realist theory and criticism are “stuck.” At least, this seems to be the case within American literature scholarship. For the most part, magical realism has been associated with—and thus discussions thereof have been restricted to—non-U.S., postcolonial literatures. As my dissertation argues throughout, it is time that we turn to American magical realism, locate its whole if still fluid canon, and, as we do so, expand and complicate the predominantly stylistic notion of magical realism with a cultural understanding and correspondingly cultural analysis of the phenomenon. Specifically, I will focus on the cultural-ideological role the magical plays in such texts. More to the point, I will deal with characters undergoing a complex restructuring process wherein their beliefs are reassessed and reformed as a result of the magical situations they face. In this way, the magical acts, I maintain, as a cultural agent, not only opening up new possibilities and worlds for the characters, but also allowing for the reformation of longstanding notions. As a result of this process, characters wrestle with, and also adopt, new ideologies, often gaining strength and a new understanding of life. The cultural-ideological comes into play at this point, as the magical, traditionally viewed by critics as a matter of formal device, bears on representations of culture and cultural behavior broadly.

First, we must examine the roles of both magical realism and the magical.

Broadly, magical realism is a literary genre, where there is a seamless blending of magical occurrences within a realistic setting (we will examine this more in-depth later). More specifically, in many U.S. works, magical realism is a literary device, wherein authorial choices embed these magical episodes in the text as a way of defamiliarizing readers and characters, allowing them to approach a particular subject with “fresh” eyes—the magical permits characters and readers to see common subjects and issues in a new light, revealing new truths about those subjects. Thus, in the U.S. works I will analyze, it is the magical ensuing from magical realism (the narrative device) that provides this defamiliarization. What I’m referring to when I say magical, then, is an extraordinary occurrence or event that is outside the realm of natural or scientific laws—something for which there is not rational explanation. This is not to say that the magical is always authorally instated, for the magical in some works is actually found in the particular culture’s beliefs and traditions, which the author then draws upon in his or her text.

However, this does bring us to an important distinction between U.S. and Postcolonial magical realism. In the U.S. texts I address, the magical functions as a cultural agent on individual characters. This differs from most postcolonial works, as we will discuss later. In most postcolonial texts, the magical works at a national level and delves into broader political, social, and economic issues that a particular country faces. At this level, magical realism frequently draws on magical beliefs of multiple cultures, cultures that are not necessarily the author’s own, in order to move the text toward a more

nationalistic outlook. For instance, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez not only draws from the cultural beliefs and traditions of his own Spanish descended peoples, but also from regional (stories he heard growing up in coastal Columbia), indigenous, and Caribbean-African. In drawing from so many different cultural traditions, ones that are not inherently the author's own, many postcolonial magical realist texts, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, exoticize these cultures—their traditions, beliefs, and the magical surrounding them. The cultures become something magical and mystical in and of themselves, and the end result is that, frequently, no clear sense of the actual culture is imparted through the text to the reader. Functioning at an individual level, though, U.S. authors are more likely draw their magical realism from their own particular culture's traditions and beliefs magical. Since this is a culture with which they are exceedingly familiar, the same, exoticizing tendency does not appear. The cultural traditions, beliefs, and the magical that appears alongside these aspects simply are, and they are written about in a matter-of-fact way. U.S. authors feel no need to explain any traditions and no need to define terminology and vernacular specific to the culture. Thus, it is left for the reader to investigate that with which they are unfamiliar. What we see in U.S. magical realism; therefore, is each, individual character's subjective encounter with the magical, which helps them explore more specific cultural issues such as race, gender, and history, rather than the national issues of its postcolonial counterpart. Since this is a subjective encounter, and since no two character's backgrounds are the same, the way each character wrestles with the issues the magical highlights varies widely across the texts. While these are subjective experiences,

the outcomes, in a general sense, are quite similar—characters are empowered, develop a new sense of self, and adopt a more positive worldview.

The chapters will analyze these aforementioned cultural aspects in detail. First, however, I will examine current criticism, and show why we need to reevaluate magical realism and magical realist theory; here, I will also touch on magical realism's relation to postcolonialism. Second, the introduction will examine the complex relationships between postmodernism and U.S. magical realist fiction. Third, it will discuss how the style functions as a cultural tool in this fiction; how, as a result, a germane, cultural approach is in order; and what such an approach would set out to do. And fourth, the introduction will also provide a chapter-by-chapter outline of the whole project. What I offer below, I might add, is a series of broad distinctions and observations that the chapters will further substantiate and qualify.

Very simply stated, magical realism is the blending of *nonrealistic*—fantastic, supernatural, mythic, or oneiric—occurrences into a *realistic* story where such unusual episodes are characteristically narrated or perceived as “ordinary,” daily events. German art critic Franz Roh first coined the term in 1925, applying it to a new style of art. Using the word interchangeably with “post-expressionism,” Roh declared that within this art “the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (16). Roh went on to note that this new art “employs . . . techniques that endow all things with a deeper meaning and reveal mysteries that always threaten the secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things” (17-18). Influenced by Roh's essay, Alejo Carpentier would expand on the concept in the 1940s, terming it the marvelous real

in his 1949 essay “On the Marvelous Real in America.” Carpentier believed that “[e]verything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous” (“Baroque” 102). Claiming the style for Latin America, he said, “the marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin America” (“Baroque” 104).¹ Most early analyses of magical realist texts, as a result, examined only Latin American works.

The 1940s and 1950s, frequently referred to as the Latin American “Boom,” saw an increase in the style’s use in the region, which both intensified the link and relegated the style to Latin America.² Many key essays on the style, such as Angel Flores’ “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” and Luis Leal’s “Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature,” also came from this region and claimed magical realism as their own. It is with Flores’ essay that we see some of the term’s first applications and quarrels over its meaning. Flores cites Franz Kafka as an influence on magical realism:

[f]or the sake of convenience I shall use the year 1935 as the point of departure of this new phase of Latin American literature, of magical realism. It was in 1935 that Jorge Luis Borges’ collection *Historia universal de la infamia* [A Universal History of Infamy] made its appearance in Buenos Aires, at least two years after he had completed a masterly translation into Spanish of Franz Kafka’s shorter fiction. . . . From then magical realism has grown in an exciting crescendo. (113)

The inclusion of Kafka and Borges, often considered fantastic writers, within magical realism raised the ongoing debate over the definitions of the two terms.³ Leal, who first addressed this issue, says, “in these magical realist works the author does not need to justify the mystery of events, as the fantastic writer has to. In fantastic literature the

supernatural invades a world ruled by reason” (123).⁴ In traditional aesthetics, generally, it is agreed that in the fantastic, the supernatural constitutes an intrusion, and the characters in the work do not accept it; in short, the supernatural usually is discredited. With magical realism, on the other hand, the magical is accepted, and it is not explained away. Numerous critics have entered this argument, trying to determine the distinctions between the two styles, as well as which authors belong to each.⁵ As of yet, there is no consensus on either definitions or authors. Borges exemplifies this dilemma. As Scott Simpkins notes, “[l]argely because of his close ties with the fantastic, the designation of Borges as a magic realist has created critical dissent, although he is credited by some critics as one of the major early influences on the contemporary magic realism movement” (140).

It is not until much later in the century that discussion of the genre moved to other authors from “third world” or “postcolonial” countries such as Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri. As Suzanne Baker observes in “Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Strategy,” “[p]ostcolonial literature not only attacks colonial attitudes, but also seeks for alternative positions for the indigenes to occupy. One effective strategy of this enterprise is the deployment of the device termed ‘magic realism’” (55). The tendency to look at magical realism as a postcolonial tool then expanded to include non-Third World (Australian, American, Canadian, etc.) ethnic literatures. Roughly put, what we see in these postcolonial and ethnic traditions is the exploration of marginalized peoples and the oppression they experience. Magdalena Delicka writes that “[f]or American ethnic writers such as Amy Tan and Louise Erdrich, magic realism becomes a tool of literary

expression through which they can try to change the way people think about different cultures and expand the notion of humanity, which now encompasses multiple ethnic dimensions” (32).⁶ Again, Delicka points toward magical realism as a postcolonial narrative strategy used by American writers,⁷ but she is only one of overwhelming number of U.S. critics discussing magical realism as a postcolonial phenomenon.⁸ Even recent work on magical realism by Wendy B. Faris and Frederick Luis Aldama devote whole chapters if not entire books to magical realism as postcolonial.⁹ Faris, in her introduction, even says that “[i]n short, my basic aims in this study are to explore the importance of magical realism in contemporary literature and its power as a postcolonial style” (*Ordinary* 4). Thus, we see within American magical realist theory and criticism an ever-expanding discussion of the magical in postcolonial terms, and it is no surprise that, since a postcolonial outlook often is ascribed to magical realism, many studies explore the cultural folklore, mythology, and/or storytelling that appear in the works.¹⁰ While mythology and folklore can be important features of magical realism, it is important to note that they do not necessarily link all texts in the genre. Many texts, such as Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, in fact, create their own myths, rather than relying on pre-existing myths. As Liam Connell notes,

various attempts to define the genre through a series of extra-literary criteria merely serve to codify a set of prejudices about Western European and non-western societies and their respective modes of thinking. That is to say that non-Western societies are persistently characterized through a series of indicators which are categorized as primitive—one of which is a residual belief in myth, magic, and the use of ritual. Western nations by contrast are characterized as progressive, developing, *modern*. (95)

Connell raises an issue that has long plagued magical realist criticism—the idea that the texts and their authors are largely from non-Western and Third-World countries that lag behind the rest of the Western world (politically, economically, etc.), hence the genre’s attribution to the postcolonial and the “primitive.” Connell adeptly points out that magical realists texts are not the only texts to play with myths (Yeats is one example cited), nor are non-Western countries the only ones facing oppressive conditions.

Dwelling on magical realism’s postcolonial attributes is a valid and necessary approach. However, with the ever-growing number of magical realist texts produced by U.S. authors, it is time, as I have suggested, to a) expand the discussion of American magical realism and b) take this discussion in a cultural-ideological direction—investigating the impact the magical has on shifting an individual’s cultural and worldviews.¹¹ Jeanne Delbaere-Garant rightly maintains, “magical realism is not exclusively a postcolonial phenomenon, but a much older one whose various offshoots require more precise and specific definitions” (249).¹² Yet, little work has been done on magical realist texts that are not deemed postcolonial. It is in response to this situation that my study turns to U.S. magical realist works. Only two critics, Stephen Slemon and Theo D’haen, have addressed the fact that magical realism from non-postcolonial countries is often considered “controversial.”¹³ Both, though, only give passing mentions to the issue, with Slemon finding that the inclusion of Canadian literature as magical realist is “perhaps the most startling development for magic realism in recent years, since Canada, unlike these other regions [India and Nigeria] is not part of the Third World”

(407). Slemon also notes that “critics, until very recently have been singularly uninterested in applying the concept of magic realism to texts written in English” (408).

Much of this resistance has to do with U.S.’s highly controversial “postcolonial” status. Unlike the majority of Britain’s former imperial holdings, the U.S. has been in a position of power for centuries. As D’haen remarks, “[t]he reason why U.S. scholarship seems most resistant to applying the term magic realism to its own literary products is perhaps that the United States has been the most ‘privileged center’ of all in our postwar world” (200-201). D’haen goes on to discuss modernist William Faulkner, questioning whether he should also be termed a magical realist. The Dutch critic insists that “[t]he very fact that this notion probably strikes most of us as extravagant still might well say more about the resistance of American scholarship to applying this particular term to American literature than about that literature itself” (200). In the Americas, the typical perception long has been that postmodernism belongs to the U.S. and Canada, while magical realism belongs to Central and South America.¹⁴ Another reason for this resistance to the notion of a well-structured U.S. magical realism, has been, as Shannin Schroeder suggests, that the magical is not considered “high art.”¹⁵ However, postmodernism’s intertextual-intercultural plays and amalgamation of high and low art may break this resistance down and recommends postmodernism as a vehicle or formal venue both for the authors’ use and for the critics’ explorations of magical realism.

What we have also seen of late—a positive development, to my mind—is magical realist criticism paying increasing attention paid to U.S. “ethnic” authors, despite the fact references to white, U.S., magical realist fiction authors are still scarce. Most critics

dealing with this particular magical realist fiction avoid the topic altogether.¹⁶ Faris typically remarks that postmoderns like “John Updike and John Barth embrace magical realism as elixir and replenishment, and when they and others incorporate its techniques into their texts, magical realist fictions are analogous to foreign princes who rejuvenate the verbal realms of ailing fisher kings” (*Ordinary* 168). In any event, while some ethnic authors have been lately read from a magical realist perspective, the resistance in applying the term to U.S. “non-ethnic,” largely “postmodern” authors is also (if slowly) decreasing, thereby opening new avenues for criticism. Additionally, it has been pointed out that even magical realist works that have been analyzed in postcolonial terms, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer*, can benefit from a more comprehensive, cultural-political approach. Magical realism’s accessible qualities and popular appeal (hence its actual and potential alliance with postmodernism as a collage of popular genres and intertexts) have long been noted.¹⁷ As Stephen M. Hart says,

[m]agical realism possesses a broadly based public appeal. Indeed, it was the only ‘foreign’ fiction genre chosen by Bloomsbury when the publisher launched the new Reading Group Internet books on various aspects of world literature. The genre of J. K. Rowling’s hugely successful *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is listed as none other than “magical realism.” . . . the genre has evolved over time and place. This is precisely because of the ways in which magical realism has crossed national, linguistic, and genre boundaries. (305, 306)¹⁸

Hart goes on to note that a more recent magical realist work, Paulo Coelho’s immensely popular *The Alchemist*, has already sold over 31 million copies. There may be, indeed, something beyond local histories and cultural codes that draws readers to magical realist

works. Otherwise, to be sure, culture, history, and their popular-mythic representations play a key role in magical realist works much as they do in postmodernism. Take *Beloved*, for instance, a work that has been termed postmodern.¹⁹ A reader unfamiliar with its historical background, including the references to fugitive slave Margaret Garner or to the Middle Passage, will not comprehend the novel adequately. The cultural-historical African-American component, and with it the postmodern use of such material, in all likelihood, will not be taken into account. Similarly, understanding cultural mythology and traditions that appear in magical realist novels is equally imperative, and this need speaks again to the postmodern/magic realist overlap and alliance, more specifically to why many postmodern works, “ethnic” or not, lend themselves to refreshing readings from a magical realist angle. As Gabrielle Foreman says of *Song of Solomon* and its author,

Morrison pulls readers into her own amplified reality—a reality solidly rooted in the world of African Americans, in black cultural traditions. . . .Solomon, the flying African, is not simply a fantastic figment of a single author’s imagination, rather, he springs from her imagination *and* black cultural traditions. (299-300)

Both elements matter and converge in a reputedly postmodern text whose postmodernism (intertextuality, cultural collage, etc.) combines with magical intrusions into African-Americans’ everyday life. Like Morrison, each magical realist writer incorporates his or her own cultural beliefs, myths, traditions, and histories. Knowing all these deeply enhances the reader’s understanding of the text. Further, also playing important roles are cross-cultural and more broadly postmodern, formal elements (from self-reflexivity to

collage and pastiche) in magical realist works, experiences and/or emotions common to readers regardless of nationality, race, or culture.

As a “strain” within postmodernism, as D’haen sees it, magical realism complicates the critics’ job as this “strain” also encroaches upon other related strains, genres, and movements.²⁰ Takayuki Tatsumi also pursues this thought in “Comparative Metafiction: Somewhere Between Ideology and Rhetoric” when he discusses the work of postmodern authors like Thomas Pynchon and William Gibson, both of whom have employed magical realist devices:

[b]oth *Vineland* and *The Difference Engine* seem to fit descriptions of three terms that recently have been used to describe American fiction of the late 1980s: (1) ‘North-American Magical Realism’ . . . (2) ‘Slipstream’ . . . and (3) ‘Avant-Pop’. . . In different ways each of these unfamiliar terms demonstrates the ways that earlier structures of binary oppositions that used to make distinctions in literature are deconstructed in our current hypercapitalist age. (3)

What we see in contemporary American literature, as a result, is genre intermingling both within and outside the heading of postmodernism.²¹ A work termed science fiction may contain magical realist elements, and vice versa;²² a work called simply postmodernist, such as Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, may also contain magical realist elements.²³ Yet again, little attention has been paid to this blurring of genres and more generally to the magical realist dimension of the text lodged either within or across them. And even when magical realism theorists do look at the similarities and the distinctions among the magical realism, postmodernism, and postmodern varieties such the Avant-Pop, the primary focus of magical realist criticism is still the postcolonial.²⁴ Conversely, when

postmodern critics like Linda Hutcheon (in her *Politics of Postmodernism*, for instance) refer repeatedly and extensively to such magical realists as Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie, they never mention magical realism. Likewise, Brian McHale also references numerous magical realist authors and texts in *Constructing Postmodernism* but only mentions the term twice in passing. However, in eliminating discussion of the use of magical realism and the presence of the magical, important issues the works raise are missed. For instance, in the works I examine, the significance of magical realism's purpose—how its magic effects cultural agency, the issues of which the magical makes each character aware, and the ensuing growth each character experiences—are diminished and even disregarded when no discussion of the style occurs.

What distinguishes, then, magical realism from postmodernism? According to D'haen, "the following features are generally regarded as marking postmodernism: self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the dissolution of character and narrative instance, the erasure of boundaries, and the destabilization of the reader" (192-93). Granted, this is a laundry list of rather general features, but it would not hurt to identify first some basic common qualities, so let us move on to the five primary and fairly broad qualities of magical realism as listed by Faris. According to her, there is an "'irreducible element' of magic, something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them. . .," then, "[r]ealistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in;" "[t]he reader may hesitate (at one point or another) between two contradictory understandings of events;" "[w]e experience the closeness or near-merging of two realms,

two worlds;” and “[t]hese fictions question received ideas about time, space, and identity” (167-73). Then Faris enumerates nine secondary characteristics often (not always) found in magical realism: 1) “metafictional dimensions;” 2) “verbal magic;” 3) “childlike” or “primitive” narratives; 4) repetition; 5) metamorphosis; 6) “antibureaucratic” positions; 7) ancient beliefs or mythology; 8) magic, deemed as communal rather than individual; and 9) “carnavalesque spirit” (175-83).²⁵ Now, if we look more closely at the characteristics listed for both postmodernism and magical realism, there are virtually no distinctions. Both utilize many of the same narrative strategies. There is just one, major difference: the magical, understood as form or style of representation; it is magic’s presence that still distinguishes magical realism from postmodernism while, as we saw, the later can include the former. For this reason, magical realism is, or appears to be, essentially a form or style, rather than a genre such as postmodernism—a genre that may or may not feature that style, form, or device, that modality of presentation. And it is not a new style either. Magical realism has been used for centuries, from the medieval King Arthur tales to Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” to Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, with each magical realist work reflecting its time period. Contemporary magical realism too reflects the same issues, the same techniques as Postmodernism. The difference, of course, is the presence and, we shall see below, the function of the magical—that is, what magical realism does when used by a medieval writer, a neo-classical satirist, or by a postmodernist for that matter.²⁶ This dissertation will discuss magical moments *in* postmodern works too, but for the most part will draw from those

texts where those moments are more than just exceptional incidents, defining instead what those texts are and do, stylistically *and* otherwise.

I begin to raise this question here with help from a postmodernist critic like McHale, who claims that

Postmodernist fiction . . . is fiction organized in terms of an ontological dominant, fiction whose formal strategies implicitly raise issues of the mode of being of fictional worlds and their inhabitants, and/or reflect on the plurality and diversity of worlds, whether “real,” possible, fictional, or what-have-you . . . (147)²⁷

The magical style of presentation, through the magic itself, raises exactly these questions for both the characters and readers who encounter the magical. But I would like to expand this notion, for often, magical realism does not simply raise ontological questions about fictional worlds; it also raises these same questions, for *dramatis personae* and readers alike, about the actual world. Characters’ and/or readers’ notions of the world, their world views, and their ideologies often shift and transform upon encountering the magical. In talking of angelic presences within postmodern works, McHale says that “angels call attention to the plurality of worlds and world-versions in postmodernist texts, and to the ontological ‘seams’ or ‘rifts’ between adjacent or rival worlds which often fissure these texts” (202).²⁸ This is not just true of angels, but of all magical occurrences. Writers employ the magical to pinpoint the fact that there is still much that we do not know about the world, and that very little can be attributed to pure, immediately palpable “fact”—almost every day, a new discovery disproves an idea thought self-evident, challenging previous views and ideologies.

Faris, following Jean Weisgerber's model, points to two magical realist strands: a "scholarly" and a "mythical" one. The scholarly is attributed to "European" magical realism, whose universe is "speculative." The mythical is attributed to Latin American magical realists, who rely heavily on mythology and folklore. Faris does not tell us, however, what characterizes each strand, and she also admits that the two types overlap, as is the case with Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl" and "The Night Face Up."²⁹ Both international and U.S. magical realism often rely on mythology. One slight difference (although there are exceptions) is that both non-U.S. and U.S. ethnic writers will use actual myths, as with Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* or Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, whereas white, U.S. authors are more likely to create a highly personal, fictional mythology, as in Alice Hoffman's *The River King*. Yet again, this distinction does not always hold up, as is the case with Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (fictitious mythology), Katherine Vaz's "Math Bending Unto Angels" (no mythology at all), or Updike's *Brazil* (a rewrite of the Tristan and Iseult myth).

It also has been pointed out that most magical realist works, whether domestic or not, raise questions about the universe, which can be true of most art. So, the two categories, scholarly and mythical, do not get us very far. I would argue, then, that the primary distinction between the two is in what is highlighted or set in motion through the magical, what the "style" *does* in and to the narrative's cultural and philosophical world, how it impacts the "values" of that world and those sharing those values. While all magical realism heavily utilizes history and all the weighty, sociopolitical and economic issues tied to it, it is in this utilization where we see different objectives depending on

cultural context. History is pushed to the forefront in works such as Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Allende's *The House of Spirits*. In these texts, history operates on a national level, and characters often serve the broader purpose of the nation. While we do see some focus on particular cultures, such as with Muslim and Hindu cultures in *Midnight's Children*, the focus still is more on the country's (in this case India's) national identity. The distinction between nation and culture is anything but clear-cut, but overall, U.S. magical realism utilizes historical representation to focus more specifically on individuals and on particular cultures within the nation—more exactly, within the multinational landscape—rather than on any vaster national picture. For instance, Morrison's *Beloved* closely examines the history of slavery and how it affects specific characters such as Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. Through them, we also see what slavery has done to the black people. Similarly, in Updike's *Brazil*, the emphasis is on two individual characters (Tristão and Isabel), and it is through these characters that we come to focus on cultural racism and prejudice and rather indirectly on the narrative of Brazilian nationhood. It is through this focus on particular people and their culture that U.S. magical realism raises broader questions about the “world.” Notably, these questions are implicit in the more concrete interrogations regarding particular, communal situations, beliefs, and values—whole ideologies embodied in unique configurations of history, space, and feeling.

While this study cannot and will not ignore the political, my main objective will be a discussion of magical realism as a vehicle for the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the characters' views of the culture and overall world they live in. Time

and again, in works that I draw on here, a magical transformation occurs: *a transformation that not only affects the body and the material world, but also how the characters see and value particular aspects of their environment.* The magical change is a signal of this cultural and philosophical crisis and reorientation. These complex transformations are my primary focus, and it is with an eye to them that I will examine the role of magical realism in U.S. texts.³⁰ Over and over again, we encounter characters who are often lost or unsure of themselves. Their beliefs and values are, simply speaking, limiting; they do not offer security and/or a comprehensive understanding of the surrounding world. This is where the magical comes in, and where its cultural role becomes apparent: the character's experiences with the magical cause them to revisit their beliefs and values.

As David Mikics notes, "magical realist writing often stems from a place and time in which different cultures or historical periods inhabit a single cultural space" (373). In this sense, the U.S. is a perfect environment, with a range of cultures coming together and influencing each other. On the subject of culture, Richard Brislin says it "refers to widely shared ideals, values, formation and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities that become unconsciously or subconsciously accepted as 'right' and 'correct' by people who identify themselves as members of a society" (10-11). I mention these definitions of culture and cultural interaction because our writers employ the magical as a cultural tool or transformative agent. Using magical realism as a narrative device, U.S. authors utilize the magic in their particular culture's traditions and beliefs in order to defamiliarize. The magical obscures common issues so that characters and

readers (we will explore the impact on readers more in-depth later) alike can approach them with “fresh” eyes. This defamiliarization allows both to see the perspectives on an issue that they were previously unable to see before, which, in turn, lets them re-evaluate their views. For the characters, more often than not, these views had become stagnant, paralyzing them. Thus, the magical becomes a cultural agent, and according to Kevin D. Blair, cultural agents “act as intermediaries between the individual and society, helping the individual negotiate her or his role and . . . ‘person-in-environment fit’” (23-24).³¹ What we will see repeatedly is that the magical tests the characters’ beliefs, forcing them to see what they are lacking. The result is that the characters’ eyes open to new possibilities and new beliefs. Therefore, they question a certain cultural status quo and challenge its ideological grip on them.

Magical realism, then, is a style that authors use to question assumed notions of reality, material context, culture, and value.³² It is the style’s magic that often acts as a cultural agent, pushing questions and possibilities about the world to the forefront. In fact, as Magdalena Delicka comments on magical realism’s readers, when we “enter the discourse between the two dimensions of reality, we are challenged to stretch our imagination and to pose questions about our values, ideas, and beliefs” (26). This is the case, as I will show, for both readers and characters. The magical calls attention to ontological questions that resist rational explanations, bringing the mystery back. This, in turn, brings about the renegotiation of cultural values and their ideologies, as we will see in the ensuing texts. Faris claims that magical realism often presents “readers with glimpses of the transcendent within the everyday” (64-65).³³ This idea of the unknown

or mysterious reoccurs among magical realist authors. Gabriel García Márquez himself writes, realism is “a kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive a vision of reality.” (qtd. in Simpkins 143). Márquez says he wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, one of the most seminal magical realist works “simply by looking at reality, our reality, without the limitations which rationalists or Stalinists through the ages have tried to impose on it to make it easier for them to understand” (qtd. in Simpkins 144). Similarly, Alejo Carpentier found that the world around us holds the magical, just waiting for us to explore it. Carpentier points out,

the marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state [*estado límite*]. (85-86)

Magical realism, hence, both highlights the unknown, suggesting that there is something more than just the physical world around us, and challenges our preconceived views of who we are and what the world surrounding us is.

True, Kenneth J. Gergen sees the multiplicity of voices and ideas we encounter in a more pessimistic light. He claims that

social saturation brings with it a general loss in our assumption of true and knowable selves. As we absorb multiple voices, we find that each ‘truth’ is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives. We come to be aware that each truth about ourselves is a construction of the moment true only for a given time and within certain relationships. (16)

He thinks this immense number of voices creates self-doubt and tears down identifiable boundaries of identity such as gender, race, and faith. This tearing away of boundaries, due to social saturation, causes a “blurring,” which also leads to the blurring of individual selves. He observes, therefore, that “[w]ith the spread of postmodern consciousness. . . .an open slate emerges on which persons may inscribe, erase, and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding, and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits” (228). Gergen’s reference to “ever-shifting,” “ever-expanding,” and “incoherent” networks highlights the sense of chaos he attributes to postmodern thought, identity, and culture. Yet is this all disheartening? The magical realist works that attract me suggest a rather negative answer. We do see this idea of blurred boundaries and shifting identities in these works. Yet we also see the process characters undergo in waking up to new meanings of the world. The magical realist works I deal with illustrate just this defining awakening, this profound reinvention of the self amidst new ideas.

Upon encountering the magical, characters are forced to renegotiate and redefine their own beliefs, whether they be related to gender, religion, and more generally, humanity. In this respect, the magical is the vehicle for transforming characters’ subjectivity. What we will see in each chapter is that characters start with a sense of lack in themselves—a lack their own fears and their beliefs about how society perceives them feeds. Paralyzed, characters are unable to separate the self from their perceived lack, a lack they frequently base on societal standards they don’t feel they fit. It is only when the magical intervenes that subjectivity is transformed. The magical helps (and in some cases forces) characters to reassess the worldviews or ideologies that trap them. In doing

so, this worldview is positively altered, which, in turn, allows them to reassess the self. The end result is, more often than not, characters who are stronger and who have a deeper understanding of themselves and the world. They are no longer “lost,” but rather get a secure sense of themselves. With this in mind, the concepts of identity that Gergen claims are being blurred, weakened, or erased are what I would term “traditional” concepts—those of gender, race, religion, and others that I’ve mentioned earlier—that come prepackaged with certain biases and stereotypes. But what we frequently see in the transformations the characters go through in magical moments is a reformation of mindset and identity based on the characters’ newly acquired notions of the world. The characters’ reevaluation often leads them to a new sense of self no longer based on inherited concepts of identity. An essential transformation has occurred—of body and mind—and it has been empowering.

The magical also introduces the characters to new ways of knowing and understanding the world around them. These ways of knowing, of course, differ based on the issue each character struggles with—whether gender, race, history, or death and the unknown. What we will see is that each author “tailors” the magical interlude to fit the issues each character encounters, raising their consciousness. Initially, characters base their knowledge on what they believe are set, societal truths. In all instances, this way of knowing is rigid, normally only looking at one, negative side of the issue—and it is this rigidity and negativity that informs their knowledge, leading to their perception of self lack and their fears. Thus, the magical defamiliarizes and makes the characters aware that there are other ways of knowing, other sides to the various issues. In this way, the

characters become more open and able to analyze the differing views on the subject at hand. This awareness, then, leads to a re-evaluation of the issue, and, more often than not, characters reject the original, negative view, replacing it with the more open, positive one.

As noted earlier, this defamiliarization through the magical is not something only characters encounter, but readers as well. For readers, particularly those outside the culture, both the culture and the magical defamiliarize. This is not to say that this defamiliarization does not occur in other cultural, regional, or ethnic American works; however, since culture is frequently at the heart of U.S. magical realism, defamiliarization is one of the first aspects readers encounter as they delve into unfamiliar territory. What happens is that the reader often approaches the text unfamiliar with the culture and/or its traditions, including the magical. In fact, I will draw from John Berendt's nonfiction work *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* to more accurately depict the reader's own process. While this also is a textual example, Berendt's experience, in many ways, mirrors that of a magical realist text's reader. First, as a New Yorker, Berendt entered Savannah, GA with preconceived, overly romantic notions of the culture based on books (*Treasure Island*), movies (*Gone with the Wind*), and music ("Hard-Hearted Hannah"). Upon visiting the Historical Society, the woman with whom he speaks derisively dismisses these notions, telling him that "Savannah could lay claim to enough real history . . . that it had no need of false honors," (40), going on to list all of the famous people who lived in the town.³⁴ He quickly decides he wants to be "more than a tourist" (36) in Savannah, but his engagements with Savannah culture

much resemble those of a magical realist reader, for Berendt is outside both the culture and its magic. For the locals, eccentricities are nothing. Thus, while Berendt marvels at the characters, traditions, and beliefs that surround him, all those inside the Savannah culture see nothing abnormal, and their comments indicate this.³⁵ For instance, one of the first people he meets, Miss Mary Harty, tells Berendt matter-of-factly that she's going to take him to "visit the dead," and that the "dead are very much with us in Savannah" (31). Therefore, like readers, Berendt's assumptions about the culture are quickly debunked, his exotic notions dismissed, and he must engage with the culture in order to understand it.

The magical experiences Berendt encounters, then, defamiliarize the culture with which he felt familiar. Spending large periods of time in Savannah over a period of years, Berendt believes he understands Savannah culture. However, he quickly realizes that he is only familiar with a small part of the area's culture when Jim Williams, a man on trial for murder, takes him to meet a local, black "root doctor" named Minerva. Williams says that Minerva, the former mistress of another famous, but now dead root doctor named Dr. Buzzard, upon his death

"put on his purple glasses and set herself up as a root doctor. She uses some of his techniques and some of her own too. She gets her special status—and some of her spiritual powers—by having direct access to Dr. Buzzard in perpetuity. She goes to his grave and calls on his spirit constantly." (243)

Again, the native Williams speaks of Minerva and her magic matter-of-factly. Yet, this is a new part of the culture with which Berendt is completely unfamiliar. Fascinated,

Minerva's magic is defamiliarizing, forcing Berendt to examine the culture in a completely new way—outside the more white, “aristocratic” Savannah culture he had come to know.

In fact, Berendt writes of Minerva and her magic almost in a tone of awe as he grapples with its implications.³⁶ This reverence is first seen in his chapter “Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil,” where Berendt writes extensively of first meeting Minerva and the ceremony she oversees that night, which includes Williams writing the name of the opposing attorney a certain way with Dove's Blood, having Williams tell positive stories about Danny Hansford, the boy he killed, and planting dimes at various points in the cemetery. Berendt, like the reader who encounters the magical, must set aside his previous notions and reapproach his subject fresh. Since it is Savannah area culture that he is most interested in, he finds that he must reassess what he believes of this culture after his encounters with the magical. This process of defamiliarization and reassessment is similar to that which the reader undergoes, the magical making the familiar strange and opening the reader's eyes to fresh outlooks on whatever subject the magical highlights. For Berendt, this means he must incorporate the wide variety of spiritual beliefs into his understanding of the culture. In the end, not only does he understand the power and significance of this spirituality—he feels “the protective force of Minerva and her spirits” (382) and can't help but wonder if Hansford didn't reach out from the grave and seek justice after Williams, cleared of all charges, dies six months later in the exact location he would have died had Hansford actually shot him—but also he recognizes the importance it has in the area culture itself. His closing words indicate his new understanding: The

city is “sealed off from the noises and distractions of the world at large” (388), which allows such diverse cultures, beliefs, and traditions to flourish.

This brings us to the individual chapters. The first chapter considers the dynamic of the magical and the religious as a matrix for transformations that are both physical and spiritual. Taking up Homi K. Bhabha’s theories on hybridity and the Other, this part looks at white characters’ encounters with Voodoo, a natively black religion, and its magic. My main texts here are Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World*, Lewis Nordan’s *Wolf Whistle*, and Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird*. In each text, characters who encounter Voodoo’s magic reassess their preexisting views of race and of self. However, in the earliest of these three works, *The Kingdom of this World*, Pauline, the main character, treats Voodoo in a radically different manner than do the later characters in U.S. works. For Pauline, it is the idea of Voodoo’s magic, rather than any actual experiences she has with the magic, that transform her. Additionally, Pauline is linked, both physically and culturally, to the blacks from whom she learns the religious practice in order to bring about her hybridity. Thus, as we will see, there are limitations to Pauline’s hybridity. Whereas Pauline becomes “black” (and adopts a correspondent view of the world), it is Nordan’s black characters who are racially transformed, a transformation highlighting the racial tensions that frequently block Voodoo’s conveyance to whites. It is, then, these black, racial transformations, in conjunction with Voodoo’s magic, that bring about hybridity and change in the white characters. In *Mockingbird*, Voodoo’s magic highlights the class tensions that the main character must overcome in order for empowerment and change to occur.

Chapter Two investigates magical gender changes signaling, as above, mutations of another order. As I show here, metamorphosis of male into female/the feminine is a key component in Philip Roth's *The Breast*, Doug Rice's *The Blood of Mugwump: A Tyresian Tale of Incest*, and Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*.³⁷ Applying Judith Butler's theories on gender, the first part of this chapter looks at ideas of gender performance and construction and how each novel's central characters—David Allen Kepesh, Evelyn/Eve, and Doug—wrestle with these ideas. The last part of this chapter illustrates how the transformation compels Kepesh, Eve and Doug to revisit their ideas of gender identity. Through this process, we not only see them develop a growing comfort with their new physicality, but also tear down traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Chapter Three is a foray into magical “hauntology.” Drawing on the notions of haunting, revenants and hegemony developed by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, this chapter shows how the ghosts in Alice Hoffman's *The River King*, Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* help the three main characters overcome certain ideas of self and repressive contexts shaped by those ideas. Furthermore, each ghost represents certain aspects of both the character's cultural history (the oppression or repression found in each of her specific communities) as well as individual history (the rejection they experience at the hands of these communities). Carlin, Charlene, and Denver respectively are here on the margins of the margins; they stand outside communities and

structures of power, but the ghosts provide them with a path to self-discovery, personal growth, and community.

Chapter Four turns to the magic of the “elements” and natural world. With help from Gaston Bachelard’s elemental theory of the imagination, I demonstrate how dissolution in Katherine Vaz’s “Math Bending Unto Angels” and Steven Millhauser’s “Rain” allegorizes a need for a blending of the imaginative and the logical so that, thus empowered, characters can overcome uncomfortable situations and examine preestablished ideas. The first part of this chapter discusses how this blending frees character such as Clara, Helio, and Mr. Porter from fears and opens their eyes to the possibilities around them. In the second part, I will focus on Sigmund Freud’s ego notion, indicating how each character’s repressed ego constricts his or her perspective, making each self-absorbed and exacerbating physical attachment and anxieties. Linking ideas of self and identity with the material, each character believes that once the body is gone, so is the identity. As we will see, it is only when characters relinquish this view—in magical situations—that their egos begin expanding, making the dissolution possible. The dissolution, then, completely opens their minds and frees them from former restrictions.

As I stress in the Conclusion, we observe throughout how the magical transforms, both physically and mentally, the characters who experience it. A close examination of the transformations in each work demonstrates how characters grow and are strengthened in various aspects related to identity, self-receptions, and the perceptions of the world around. The magical irruption marks a complex crisis, but it also provides guidance

through which the characters are ultimately empowered as they gain insight into areas of life where they before felt lost, empty, or fearful.

CHAPTER II

WHITE VODOO? MAGIC, RELIGION, AND RACE IN ALEJO CARPENTIER, LEWIS NORDAN, AND SEAN STEWART

And thought and faith and speculation on the future and the past, the desirable and the ill, will not be dead, but will be following as servants in the train of Life, not clutching at its throat with the fingers of dogma; while on will sweep the army, ever faster, through the slaveless kingdom that, completely and imposingly is, is of this world—B. Russell Herts³⁸

Respectively, set in late 1700s French colonial Santo Domingo (Haiti), 1950s Mississippi, and contemporary Houston, Texas, Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), Lewis Nordan's *Wolf Whistle* (1993) and Sean Stewart's *Mockingbird* (1998) all enact magical transformations in a religious context. While the two are distinct categories, to be sure, here we see magical realism as a vehicle through which extraordinary things occur. As each author's use of this stylistic device highlights the racial and/or cultural issues found in the different time periods, its magic forces characters (all of whom are white) to reconsider their views and ways of and in the world. Equally important is recognition of the cross-cultural dimension—of the crisis and the change it determines. As they discover the religion and faith of racial "Others" (in this case, those practicing Voodoo), characters usually undergo a crisis resulting in "illuminations." Thus, two things are in play here: first, the self discovers those others'

religious and philosophical universe during magical episodes—incidents that traditional realism can hardly accommodate—and, second, this is followed, as I will show, by a complication of the self’s own religious, philosophical, and/or cultural makeup and views through scrutiny of the values by which the self has been living. This creates a process of cultural-religious hybridization, as I show throughout the chapter. Initially, the novels’ central characters—*Kingdom’s* Pauline Bonaparte, *Wolf Whistle’s* Alice Conroy, and *Mockingbird’s* Toni Beauchamp—reflect their time’s racial and class views. As we will see, they see themselves as radically apart and distinct from an Other who is also inferior and who needs to be controlled. At first, the self sets himself and herself up antagonistically, in contrast to his or her other, but ends up adopting the black Voodoo religion. When that happens, Pauline, Alice, and Toni are transformed, “complicated” physically and/or mentally. However, as we will see, Pauline’s transformation and hybridity are limited in a way that Alice’s and Toni’s transformations are not. To discuss this hybridizing transformation, though, I will borrow some language from theories of “otherness” and “hybridity” developed by Homi K. Bhabha and other critics. Thus, what I want to do first is clarify my use of these concepts.

“Other” and “hybridity” were terms originally ascribed to colonized, marginalized, and racialized peoples. Bhabha’s influential text, *The Location of Culture*, details the original ideas and definitions of each notion. Regarding the Other, Bhabha posits that the 19th century, with its “polarity of Orient and Occident . . . in the name of progress, unleashed the exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other” (19). From the imperial perspective, anyone who differs from the white male colonizer is viewed as

inferior, and, through a range of discourses, the colonizers establish a racial and cultural hierarchy.³⁹ Bhabha writes that this discourse “demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual” (67). The colonists translate these differences as an indication of the Other’s more primitive and uncivilized nature. Repressing any similarities to the Other in themselves, the colonists not only fear they will regress to the Other’s “primitive” state, but also project those fears onto the colonized.⁴⁰ As Bhabha notes, “[i]t is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body” (45). Therefore, the colonists’ objective in creating the Other, as Bhabha says, is “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (70). These accentuated differences, then, are used to more sharply define the dominant white identity and firmly establish its superiority. Pauline, Alice, and Toni, to varying degrees, buy into these colonial ideas of the Other, for each woman initially sees herself as separate from and superior to her “others.”

According to Bhabha, hybridity occurs—in people, their cultural practices, and in their daily lives overall—when a subject people take colonial discourse and tradition and redefine/reinscribe them. In doing so, the colonized intermingle colonialist traditions and ideas with their own, creating something new. Hybridity itself is often a form of resistance to colonial discourse. Bhabha does not see it as an intermingling of cultural traditions, but rather as generating a new or “third space” in between the colonizer and colonized. The colonized use this space to combine traditions, beliefs, etc. from both

groups, and in doing so, they undermine the colonial original. For example, Bhabha talks of indigenous peoples inserting their own messages into, and thus hybridizing, the Bible and Christian religion. When this occurs, Bhabha says,

[t]he word of divine authority . . . [becomes] deeply flawed by the assertion of the indigenous sign, and in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid—neither the one thing nor the other. The incalculable colonized subject—half acquiescent, half oppositional, always untrustworthy—produces an unresolvable problem of cultural difference for the very address of colonial cultural authority. (33)

Expanding in the example, Bhabha says, “[w]hen natives demand an Indianized Gospel, they are using the powers of hybridity to resist baptism and to put the project of conversion in an impossible position. Any adaptation of the Bible was forbidden by the evidences of Christianity” (118). Bhabha also posits that the colonized challenge the dominant power as they set up a “specifically colonial space of the negotiation of cultural authority” (119).⁴¹ In this way, hybridity allows the colonized to retain and even insert their own culture into that of the colonizers, while also “appeasing” the colonizers through the adoption of their customs.

Hybridization affects, as we shall see below, not only the formerly oppressed—the racialized others—but also the whites. I will call it, for lack of a better term, “white” hybridity,” or hybridization of whiteness. This aspect has received far less discussion among scholars. Suggesting the need to consider a white hybridity, Bhabha says that “[t]he Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history . . . as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*” (6). Edna Aizenburg notes too that

[i]t seems to me that we have here a new reading of the trope of hybridity. . . .The political woes, economic afflictions, and social inequities aren't gone—this is no Pollyanna universe—but there's a refusal to be colonialism's and postcolonialism's generic, globalized, distressed, and subaltern hybrid. (466)

However, while the critic does call for a contemporary reevaluation of hybridity, she still applies the term only to formerly colonized peoples.⁴² Yet, I believe its examination needs further expansion, and a white sort of hybridity must be taken into account.

Bhabha himself stresses hybridity as an indication of cultural difference, rather than cultural diversity. I, on the other hand, believe an examination of hybridity in terms of cultural diversity is needed. Atony Easthope touches on the various types of hybridity when he notes that, “[a] second definition of hybridity [can be put forth, which] might be understood to mean an individual having access to two or more ethnic identities” (342).

But it is not just multiple ethnic heritages in an individual that create hybridity. As Easthope says, it can occur to a person when he or she has access to and draws from multiple cultures, in this chapter's case, religious practices and the extraordinary events they bring about.⁴³ The white characters who adopt Voodoo not only come to a better understanding of themselves, but also of their views of race, class, and so forth.⁴⁴ This is not to say that a more “classical” hybridity does not occur in *Kingdom*, *Wolf Whistle*, or *Mockingbird*. It happens, for example, in *Kingdom* when Ti Noël's owner, M. Lenormand de Mézy, takes him to Cuba. Forced to spend afternoons with de Mézy at a Catholic church, Ti Noël finds in the church

a Voodoo warmth he had never encountered in the Sulpician churches of the Cap.

The baroque golds, the human hair of the Christs, the mystery of the richly carved confessionals, the guardian dog of the Dominicans, the dragons crushed under saintly feet . . . had an attraction, a power of seduction in presence, symbols, attributes, and signs similar to those of the altars of the houmforts consecrated to Damballah, the Snake God. Besides, St. James is Ogoun Fai, marshal of the storms, under whose spell Bouckman's followers had risen. For that reason, Ti Noël, by way of prayer, often chanted to him an old song he had learned from Macandal. . . (Carpentier 86-87)

I quote this passage at length because it perfectly illustrates the process: Ti Noël takes the Catholic symbols from the colonizers, transposing and intermingling them with those of Voodoo until they become something more recognizable and even comforting. Resisting the colonizers' conversion attempts, he creates a new understanding of both Catholicism and Voodoo, one that helps him retain his cultural and spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, we also see how the black slave population uses hybrid tactics, for Bouckman, a black revolutionary leader, superimposes the characteristics of a Voodoo *hougan* onto a Catholic saint in order to unite his followers.

As discussed in the Introduction, U.S. ethnic authors frequently employ magical realism, using the stylistic device to delve into fractured and oppressive histories. Commenting on ethnic American magical realism, Shannin Schroeder finds that it often points to social and cultural issues the different ethnicities have experienced/are experiencing.⁴⁵ Whereas "the Boom privileged the whole male center of Latin American culture," Schroeder posits that "the North American counterpart has set out to dethrone the center" (49).⁴⁶ What we find in Nordan's *Wolf Whistle* and Stewart's *Mockingbird* is this same "deprivileging" of the dominant, white hegemony, only in both instances, it is white authors utilizing magical realism in order to dethrone white ideologies of the Other.

To do so, their characters encounter Voodoo's magic, and in each instance, it is the dead Other who conveys the religion and its magic to the characters. Voodoo, particularly its magic, is the perfect tool for this transformation, for, as Patricia Mohammed says of the religion, it provides a connection between the living and the dead.⁴⁷ Mohammed also notes of religion, including Voodoo, that "[t]he value of religion and ritual is that they unite people through a collective unconscious based on elements of belief systems and common values that people share within a culture" (133). Thus, the characters experience this connection to the dead as well as an understanding of the magic's power. This, in turn, creates a hybridity in each character as he/she adopts aspects of the religion. Nordan's and Stewart's magical realism, then, paves the way for characters and provides readers the possibility to reevaluate ideas about the Other and explore the similarities between the self and Other.⁴⁸

Kingdom, though, is not a U.S. novel, nor does Voodoo's magic conform to the same patterns as we find in Nordan and Stewart. In fact, Carpentier's use of the style, as we will later examine, is also for different reasons than those of the U.S. authors. For that matter, I have included *Kingdom* in this discussion because the novel is strikingly different from its U.S. counterparts, highlighting the dissimilar authorial uses of magical realism and magic. This sharp contrast is first seen in *Kingdom*'s views of the Other. Considering the novel's earlier literary tradition and time period, imperialistic and prejudiced views still heavily taint ideas about the Other and hybridity, and, as a result, the magical realism associated with the Other. Therefore, it is the *idea* of Voodoo's magical abilities that acts as a cultural agent, not magical realism itself. The magical also

does not influence Pauline in the same way as it does Alice and Toni. Instead, Pauline's own notions of Voodoo's power and her need for that power influence her. This makes her transformation more limited and her hybridity's permanence questionable. When compared to *Wolf Whistle* and *Mockingbird*, the differences are arresting. In these two later novels, magical realism does act as a cultural agent, the magical making previously implausible beliefs possible, including belief in Voodoo. Since there is a belief in, rather than simply a need for, Voodoo's magic, the transformations in *Wolf Whistle* and *Mockingbird* acquire a permanence that *Kingdom's* does not.

While magical realism leads to white hybridity, it is racial/bodily blurring and metamorphosis in each novel that conveys Voodoo to the white characters. The differences in the transformations reflect each novel's view of the Other, which, in turn, indicates how Voodoo can/must be transmitted to the white characters. Additionally, cultural changes often are indicated through the racial/bodily transformations. Voodoo's conveyance (the sources of this varying across the texts) to whites lets characters revisit their beliefs, values and even identities. For Alice and Toni, magical realism also results in transformation through "transcendence." According to James Harbeck, transcendence occurs when an individual recognizes the *similarities*, rather than the chasms, between himself or herself and the Other. As we will examine in *Kingdom*, there is, again, a difference. Indeed, similarities occur between Pauline and blacks in *Kingdom*, though they are not ones that she herself draws, but rather ones the narrator draws. On the other hand, after their encounters with Voodoo's magic, both Alice and Toni emphasize their own similarities to those labeled Other. Terming it the "transcendent function," Harbeck

says this is when one looks at the Other and “everything falls into place; meaning is found” (17).⁴⁹ In this light, we will explore how magical realism, through Voodoo’s magic, brings about the transcendent function for both Alice and Toni and the meanings they discover. We will also see how hybridity, “through the use of the Other’s symbols,” helps them become “more fully oneself” (Harbeck 13), for it is through their newly obtained selves that both Alice and Toni finally come into their own, setting aside previously held fears and anxieties. This hybridity also differs from common theories in that hybridity is described as a state of continual change where ideas are constantly adapted and adopted. Instead, what we see in both Alice and Toni is a more balanced state, where they adapt, adopt, and accept. In fact, prior to their hybridity, both Alice and Toni repress themselves, letting their fears take over and placing themselves in almost literal dead end situations. According to Harbeck, when “repression occurs, the contents of the unconscious must be reintegrated with those of the ego, not only through acceptance [of similarities between the self and Other], but also through acknowledgement and incorporation in identification” (14-15). Only in doing so do Alice and Toni come to understand the Other, the self and the relationship between the two. As Harbeck notes “[t]o be fully oneself, therefore, is to be fully situated in the context of humanity as a whole” (19). Religion-derived practices of hybridity, in this manner, pave the way for complex transformation that ultimately help the self see himself or herself in this context—no longer in a state of flux as occurs in hybridity theories.

Since I am examining the role of Voodoo in the novels, I want to address the intermingling of religion and magic. Many would contend that religion and magic are entirely separate. Rodney Stark, agreeing with this position, notes that

[m]agic differs from religion because it does not posit the existence of Gods, does not offer explanations either of its own domain or address questions of ultimate meaning, does not offer ‘otherworldly’ reward, and is unable to sanctify the moral order, while religion does all these. Magic and religion also differ in that the former is subject to empirical falsifications, while the latter need not be. (115)

While there is some truth to Stark’s claims, the fact remains that throughout history, religion and magic have been tied together. We see this even in present-day society when people are sainted for miracles they perform.⁵⁰ William Willeford says that both the church and magic are rooted in myth, in the same types of stories, and are both subject to truth and falsification. Regarding the religious tenets, Voodoo does posit the existence of Gods and afterlife, and Voodoo ritual includes a ceremony, after death, to release the person’s soul.⁵¹ Looking at the origins of the word now, Voodoo means “spirit” or “deity” in the Fon language, and the religion revolves around the worship of *loas* (the Voodoo equivalent of Gods).⁵² These spirits are responsible not only for different aspects of human life (love, prosperity, fertility, etc.); they also are capable of bodily possessing and communicating with the individuals who worship them.⁵³ Likewise, they can be called upon to perform certain magical acts. In this way, the Voodoo religion intertwines spiritual aspects with magical practices. As we will see in *Wolf Whistle* and

Mockingbird, it is Voodoo's magic that acts as a cultural agent, inspiring transformation of body and cultural mindset.

The Voodoo religion, according to Carolyn Long, “originated in the coastal West African nation-states now occupied by Benin, Togo, and Nigeria, known collectively as the Bight of Benin” (18).⁵⁴ The slave trade brought both the people and religion to the Caribbean. The religion's own hybridity is early indicated through the ways (as seen in the earlier quote from Ti Noël) the Caribbean blacks intermingled Voodoo with Catholicism (this hybrid was later termed Santería). Set in Santo Domingo (now Haiti), it is precisely here that we encounter Voodoo in *Kingdom*. Furthermore, the 1791-1804 Santo Domingo revolution and other historical developments in the area brought Voodoo to the U.S. as many Caribbean people fled to New Orleans. Long notes that Voodoo beliefs were easily absorbed into the pre-existing African religions in the American South. Soon, the religion was again carried through slave trade, traveling from New Orleans up the Mississippi delta to Memphis, and this movement is why we next find Voodoo in *Wolf Whistle*'s fictional Arrow Catcher, Mississippi.⁵⁵ Finally, Voodoo later traveled to Houston, *Mockingbird*'s setting, in the 1930s and 40s, when, as Long says, “many black Louisianans migrated to Houston to take jobs in the oil refineries and railroad yards, bringing with them a kind of New Orleans-style hoodoo” (88).⁵⁶

That Voodoo has become a white practice of religious-cultural hybridization is reflected in the evolution of white reactions to and involvement in the religion—an evolution also reflected in *Kingdom*, *Wolf Whistle*, and *Mockingbird*. Not surprisingly, earlier, nonfictional reports on the religion often expressed both shock and amazement

toward white Voodoo practitioners. For example, Newbell Puckett makes six references to white participants in a four-page section of his work called “Diabolic Festivals.”

Puckett cannot help but emphasize the view of “white Voodooists” (usually female and naked) as abnormal. Of a Voodoo gathering on Lake Pontchartrain, he writes that “Dr. Alexander, a colored Voodoo doctor, the successor of Marie Laveau presided, and here again a large number of white women of respectable middle-class families were found almost completely disrobed” (Puckett 186-87). Notably, his emphasis is not on the Voodoo gathering, but on the white women, their class, and their state of undress.

Puckett not only finds it shocking that whites would participate in Voodoo, but also that white, well-to-do women would participate. Written in 1926, Puckett’s text recounts numerous Voodoo/Hoodoo beliefs and practices. However, he maintains throughout an extremely racist and condescending attitude.

In her work on Voodoo and capitalism, Long points, however, to a complete change that has taken place in white Voodoo practices in the U.S. She informs us that, “[t]here has been a revival of interest in Voodoo among young, well-educated people of all races. . . . Contemporary Voodoo priests and priestesses lead a middle-class, multiracial community of believers” (68). For example, Sallie Ann Glassman, a Voodoo text author, tarot card designer, and botánica store owner, is white and was raised Jewish.⁵⁷ Long also gives a partial listing of Voodoo stores and wholesalers at the end of her work. Of the seventy-six listed with owners and race information available, whites, by far, own the most stores at forty-two.⁵⁸ Thus, there has been a white movement toward this native, black religion, and *Wolf Whistle*, set just prior to the civil rights era,

shows just the beginning of this cultural influence. The novel presents Voodoo beliefs and practices slowly entering the white world while in *Mockingbird's* contemporary setting, Voodoo is already a way of life, a family tradition for the whites at the novel's center.

Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*

Born in Cuba in 1904, Alejo Carpentier came from an upper class family, his mother a Russian musician and his father a French architect. Consequently, he was well-educated and fluent in both French and Spanish. Becoming a journalist, he was arrested for his political activity against Cuban dictator Machado and exiled to Paris in 1928. It was in Paris that he became active in the avant-garde literary movement and developed close friendships with two other Latin American expatriates, Guatemalan Ángel Asturias and Venezuelan Arturo Uslar Pietri, with whom he spent much time discussing politics and literature.⁵⁹ From these exchanges and literary associations in Paris, Carpentier developed the idea of *lo real maravilloso*. The treatment of fluid, ever-tentative white hybridity featured in *Kingdom* is in all likelihood a “byproduct” of his desire to explore the “marvelous” in the world around him. Returning from France in the early 1930s, he writes disgustedly of modern art, observing that

[b]y invoking traditional formulas, certain paintings are made into a monotonous junkyard of sugar-coated watches, seamstresses' mannequins, or vague phallic monuments: the marvelous is stuck in umbrellas or lobsters or sewing machines or whatever on a dissecting table, in a sad room, on a rocky desert. Poverty of the

imagination, Unamuno said, is learning codes by heart. (Carpentier “Marvelous” 85)

Carpentier felt the remedy for this “poverty” was in looking at the spirituality embedded in indigenous and African cultures.⁶⁰ The cultural traditions of the different groups adeptly captured the “marvelous,” something he believed the rationalist West had lost.⁶¹ Carpentier himself expounds, after a trip to Haiti and encounters with Voodoo rites, that “I was moved to see this recently experienced marvelous reality beside the tiresome pretension of creating the marvelous that has characterized certain European literatures over the past thirty years” (Carpentier “Marvelous” 84). Latin America’s rich roots and history, therefore, were the fodder for enriching writing. In this sense, Carpentier adopts a typical, colonialist attitude, and his “literary extraction” is simply another way of exploiting native “resources.”

Carpentier underscores his primary desire to use magical realism to enhance Latin American writing and reinvigorate the literary world is underscored through the fragmented Haitian history he provides in *Kingdom*.⁶² As Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert notes, in the seven chapters of Part Two, which cover the revolution’s beginning in 1791 to the 1804 declaration of independence, there is “no mention of the leaders of the revolutionary army, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Alexandre Pétion, or Jacques Dessalines. Henri Christophe is mentioned solely as having closed his Auberge del la Couronne to join the Revolutionary Army” (119). In view of Carpentier’s historical omissions and his depiction of Voodoo itself, it bears noting Paravisini-Gebert’s suggestion that “despite Carpentier’s best intentions, [the novel] remains dependent on problematic

representations of Haiti as a land of exotic otherness” (121). While Carpentier’s magical realism, in a limited fashion, captures aspects of Latin American culture and spirituality, it also exploits and condescends to the very people it chooses to “celebrate.” What we see in the work is still the degradation of the Other—the depiction of both blacks and their religion indicates their “savagery,” their inferiority to the white colonists. Frederick Luis Aldama corroborates this verdict by suggesting that Carpentier “developed a particular form of ethnocentrism, for America, with its ‘primitive’ peoples and magical landscape, becomes the object of European desire” (11). Carpentier’s intended audience, moreover, is the well-educated white population, hence the manifesto on *lo real maravilloso* that appears at the beginning of the novel and serves as a guide for how whites should read the text.⁶³ For this reason, many scholars hold Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* in *Kingdom* and his subsequent novel *The Lost Steps* as a pale comparison to later magical realism. Describing the two, Aldama sees magical realism as “a vital and sophisticated use of language and storytelling,” whereas *lo real maravilloso* is “a more commercially oriented, lazy, and clumsy storytelling form” (12).⁶⁴ Carpentier’s literary agenda, ethnocentric views, and intended audience thus arguably inhibit the novel’s magical realism and the full-fledged identity metamorphosis it normally prompts, something that does not occur in *Wolf Whistle* or *Mockingbird*.

Further differentiating *Kingdom* from the other two novels is what I would call the rather abstract *idea* of Voodoo magic as opposed to Voodoo magic as personal *experience*. It is only the latter that can change those going through it, living it out. As we will see with Pauline Bonaparte, the idea alone cannot trigger a substantial, sustainable

transformation, which becomes clearer once we examine her characterization and involvement in Voodoo.⁶⁵ Our examination will reveal the conditions placed on white hybridity and the reasons why Pauline takes up the religion. Easily abandoning Voodoo once it no longer fills her needs, Pauline quickly returns to her “civilized” European world.

But what are the reasons she turns to Voodoo? For one, Pauline’s rebellious nature and distaste for Christianity lead her toward the new religion. She refers to her Christian upbringing as “the lies of the Directory, in whose disbelief she had grown up” (Carpentier 99). Consequently, her initial attitude is almost playful, as she begins her Voodoo exploration with small things such as avoiding crack in the walkways, bringing trinkets for the charms that Soliman, a black slave, creates, and so forth. The condition that pushes her fully into Voodoo, though, is sheer fear. When her husband, General Leclerc, contracts the plague, Pauline becomes terrified that he will die. As Leclerc’s condition worsens, Pauline’s acceptance of the religion intensifies. This culminates with the scene the horrified French maids’ encounter where Soliman is

circling in a strange dance around Pauline, who was kneeling on the floor with her hair hanging loose. Soliman, wearing only a belt from which a white handkerchief hung as a *cache-sexe*, his neck adorned with blue and red beads, was hopping about like a bird and brandishing a rusty machete. Both were uttering deep groans which, as though wrenched from inside, sounded like the baying of dogs when the moon is full. A decapitated rooster was fluttering amid scattered grains of corn. (Carpentier 100)

Her fear driving her,⁶⁶ Pauline believes that only Voodoo's magic can save her husband.⁶⁷ With fear as her primary motivation, Pauline's transformation remains transitory.

Voodoo's conveyance from the blacks to Pauline also necessitates a link between the two. Pauline's bodily transformation and racial blurring establishes this link, which, in turn, provides the pathway for the religion's transference. These links not only insinuate black inferiority, but also make Voodoo's conveyance from black slave to white aristocrat both possible and plausible. The first link emphasized is Pauline's primitive or primal nature, as seen in her "rampant" sexuality. Her sexuality is first referenced through discussions of her extramarital affair with an actor named Lafont. Later, she also is described as "a connoisseur of male flesh" (Carpentier 91).⁶⁸ Sexuality, a primitive or primal urge, is one that "decent" women should not have/obey.⁶⁹ Through her animalistic sexual desire, Pauline is no longer simply Other because of her gender, but also because she resembles (according to the colonists' views) blacks.

Pauline's skin color further differentiates her from the white, aristocratic society of which she is a member. Arriving at the Island of La Tortue (near Haiti), Pauline quickly acclimates herself. While other white members of her party find the island hot and stifling, Pauline relishes the climate. She freely wears the lighter, island clothing and soaks up as much of the vibrant sunlight as possible. Later, "[s]he laughed when her bedroom mirror revealed to her that her skin, tanned by the sun, had become that of a splendid mulatto" (Carpentier 97). Pauline now is more closely linked to the blacks than to her own race, her comfort on the island further strengthening her link to the natives.⁷⁰

Considering her background, anyone in Pauline's position would feel far from comfortable on the island, as is evidenced through the other colonists' misery. However, Pauline is in her element. She also admits Voodoo's practices "stirred up in her the lees of old Corsican blood, which was more akin to the living cosmogony of the Negro" (Carpentier 99) than that of her own people. Pauline's Corsican blood, then, further aligns her with the blacks. Having only 15 years of independence in the 18th century, Corsican people were known for their warring and sometimes outlawish ways; they were not the "civilized" French who promoted and followed the Christian Directory.⁷¹ Thus, the racial blurring and bodily transformation establish the necessary links between Pauline and the blacks, and it is only on this "equal" ground that Voodoo can be transmitted to her.

Her bodily transformation also effects cultural changes in Pauline, as she revisits her views of blacks and Voodoo. Her changing opinion of blacks is reflected in her relationship with Soliman. Originally, Pauline treats him like a toy and a pet. She teases him sexually when he bathes her, "for she knew that he was continually tortured by desire" (Carpentier 99). She also *allows* him to sleep on a rug on her bedroom floor. Despite the fact that he is treated better than most slaves, it is obvious that Pauline still sees him as inferior. This view changes, though, as she delves deeper into Voodoo. First, she gives "ear to the advice of Soliman" (Carpentier 98). Here, she places him in a more equal role, both depending on and following the advice he offers. As her involvement in Voodoo increases even more, Soliman attains a mentor-like status. Placing him in a position of power, he becomes "the real master of the Island (La

Tortue)” (Carpentier 99). Pauline no longer sees Soliman as inferior, but rather as a strong and powerful man on whom she can depend.

Viewing Voodoo differently than do the French colonists, Pauline perceives not only the religion’s power, but also the power that blacks draw from it.⁷² The French, on the other hand, completely dismiss Voodoo. This dismissal, consequently, leads to a successful revolution in Haiti.⁷³ Macandal, a Mandigue Voodoo *hougan*, sets the revolution in motion, poisoning both livestock and colonists.⁷⁴ The colonists become so terrified that they “whipped and tortured their slaves, trying to find an explanation. But the poison went on decimating families. . . .Nor could prayer, doctors, vows to saints or the worthless incantations . . . check the secret advance of death” (Carpentier 34-35). The colonists’ belief in the slaves’ inferiority prohibits them from seeing the blacks as a threat.⁷⁵ Furthermore, we see the emphasis and power the French place on Christianity, believing their faith will help them. Yet, the colonists’ downfall comes from their inability to understand that all religious beliefs can empower, and they are taken by surprise when Voodoo unites the slaves.⁷⁶ No longer afraid of the colonists’ recriminatory actions, the slaves secretly aid and abet the powerful *hougan*, distributing the poison that decimates the colonists.

Rather than trying to understand the blacks and their beliefs, the colonists, instead, become paranoid. They pour out their anger and rage with increasing frenzy until the situation becomes so dire that “[a]nyone walking through the fields or near the houses after sunset was shot down without warning” (Carpentier 35). This abuse leads to further cohesion among the slaves. Not only do they see Macandal’s incredible power,

but also the colonists' abuse leaves them with nothing to lose. When the colonists finally discover the culprit, the slaves' belief in Macandal's power is so strong that he is viewed as a "*hougan* of the Rada rite, invested with superhuman powers as the result of his possession by the major gods on several occasions . . . [and is] the Lord of Poison" (Carpentier 36). Not realizing Macandal's invincibility in the slaves' eyes, after his capture, the colonists burn him in a public spectacle, bringing all the slaves to witness his demise. While the colonists see the hated revolutionary burn to death, the slaves see that "the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: 'Macandal saved!'" (Carpentier 51-52). Failing to recognize and validate the slaves' beliefs costs the colonists everything. Macandal's actions and death pave the way for Bouckman and the later revolution that frees the slaves.⁷⁷ It is only after the fact that one French colonist, M. Leonard de Mézy, even realizes that "[t]he slaves evidently had a secret religion that upheld and united them in their revolts" (Carpentier 78-79). As a result, Pauline's transformation allows her to see what the colonists cannot: the power and value, as well as an understanding, of the Voodoo religion.

Despite Pauline's understanding of Voodoo, her transformation, like her darkly tanned skin, is temporary. After her husband's death, Pauline is no longer at home with La Tortue's tropical climate. Where she once felt natural and comfortable, "[n]ow the tropics seemed abominable, with the relentless buzzard waiting on the roof of the house in which someone was sweating out his agony" (Carpentier 101). In conjunction with her discomfort on the island, Pauline also is no longer comfortable with blacks, and she

quickly reverts to her “privileged” life, jumping on the first ship back to Paris.⁷⁸ While she does pack her “crumpled Creole disguises . . . [and] an amulet to Papa Legba, wrought by Soliman” (Carpentier 101) when she leaves the island, there is nothing to indicate that these have any more meaning for Pauline than a souvenir, and they are stashed away in a hamper as if packed as an afterthought.⁷⁹ Unlike the later novels, consequently, there is no transcendence for Pauline. Never does Pauline look at the blacks and see herself or find meaning; she simply returns to being the same Pauline she was before arriving on La Tortue.

Nordan: White Horror

Like many of Nordan’s writings, both fiction and nonfiction, *Wolf Whistle* explores racial tensions in the pre civil rights era South, while also giving us a more permanent white hybridity. In the novel, he illustrates the dawning white horror at racial injustice and violence in 1950s Mississippi, injustice and violence centered on the idea of black inferiority. The work is based on the lynching death of Emmett Till, “a fourteen-year-old African American boy from Chicago . . . [who] was murdered for allegedly wolf whistling at a white woman in Money, Mississippi, in 1955” (Costello 207). This murder had a profoundly horrifying effect on Nordan, a teenager in nearby Itta Bena, Mississippi at the time. Nordan says

our voice was too silent during the fifties. We didn’t say “How dare you?” Instead we just retreated and thought, “Oh my God, is this us who did this?” So we never

really even talked about it at the dinner table, we were so horrified by it [the murder] and so implicated in it, by our own silences and by our casual use of racial epithets, and things like that. It was a turning point, really. The truth is, until I embraced who I actually am, certainly who I was, I had no way of writing the story effectively. (qtd. in Bjerre 375)

The “our” Nordan refers to, which is linked to the identity he himself had to come to terms with, is the voice of the “poor white trash,” the voice and perspective that also relays the novel’s events.⁸⁰ *Wolf Whistle*’s magical realism, therefore, shows the way whites come to terms not only with a history of violence, but also their own identity. As Brannon Costello notes, “Nordan does not conceive of race as an independent, self-contained form of identity. . . .[but rather exposes] white racial identity as contingent, constructed, and precarious, thus exploding the notion of a hegemonic, self-sustaining white identity” (209). Consequently, magical realism shows how transformation evolves out of racial injustice as well as the flexibility of white identity.

Given the time period, the examples of white hybridity appearing early in the novel often are marked with racial tension and are indicative of social class. That the poor whites practice Voodoo indicates class-based divisions of self and Other. Removed from the dominant social class, and, in this respect, also Other, the poor white still differentiate themselves from the blacks, at the same time they are attracted to and adopt Voodoo. Such an example occurs when Alice visits Arrowhead’s poor, white neighborhood.⁸¹ Providing our first encounter with the religion in the novel, Voodoo permeates this area. For example, Alice sees bottle-trees, Voodoo charms to keep evil spirits away, in many yards.⁸² That this community utilizes Voodoo’s protective abilities

indicates a more self-serving use of the religion and its magic—a use that provides the community benefits. Masked in the poor white community’s adoption of Voodoo, then, is the hope for bigger rewards, rewards that could alleviate their financial situation and even raise their class standing. Alice also sees a “hundred year old Voodoo woman wearing a swastika” and stirring “a cauldron above a fire in a nearby yard” (Nordan 7).⁸³ While Nordan’s carefully chosen details imply the woman has practiced Voodoo for a long time, the juxtaposition of the Voodoo imagery with the Nazi swastika (a symbol for Aryan pride) indicates the racial tensions that still exist. Therefore, hybridity is far from seamless.

These tensions also indicate how Voodoo is conveyed to the whites. As in *Kingdom*, the religion is transmitted through bodily transformation and racial blurring. In *Wolf Whistle*, this transmission is done via the disassociation of black characters from their race. This disassociation is first apparent in the metamorphosis of Bobo, the murdered black child. After Bobo’s death, he is transformed into the mermaid *loa* Lasirèn or the Siren.⁸⁴ It is as a Voodoo god and not as a black child, then, that he conveys Voodoo, first to Sugar Mecklin and Sweet Austin, and later to the rest of the school children. While Nordan does not identify Bobo as Lasirèn, descriptions of both make the association evident. When Bobo first gains awareness after his death, he sees himself as a beautiful mermaid.⁸⁵ The connection between Lasirèn and Bobo is intensified through the items the *loa* carries—the mirror and the comb are the dominant symbols associated with LaSirèn, both of which Bobo (as the mermaid) holds. Nordan places special emphasis on these two items, giving them almost surrealistic qualities, for

the mermaid combs “her long hair with a comb the color of bone” and holds “in the other hand a mirror as dark and fathomless as the mirror-surface of Roebuck Lake” (178).

Glassman also describes Lasirèn as “an enchantress, and the patron Lwa of song and music. She calls out with her trumpet, and entrances with her siren’s song. Lasirèn is a beautiful sorceress. . . .[her song] calls to the Spirit” (145). Similarly, Bobo’s voice is described as that of an “angel, which is what a mermaid is, in water not air” (Nordan 184). What makes this association so important is that, as a *loa*, Bobo is in a position of power, and it is only as such that he influences and transmits Voodoo to whites. In fact, he realizes that “[b]ecause he was magic now, Bobo saw the two white boys who would find him” (Nordan 182). It is as this magical entity that Bobo can reach out to the whites.

Entering the dreams of a white child named Sugar Mecklin, Bobo first transmits Voodoo. A common occurrence according to Alfred Métraux, *loas* frequently enter people’s dreams, whereby they give people advice, warn them about impending harm, or even ask favors.⁸⁶ Bobo’s choice is unusual, though, for not only does he choose a white child, but also someone who is not faithful to the *loas*, which usually is a requirement for them to enter dreams.⁸⁷ Instead of reaching out to family and friends, Bobo reaches out to a white child his own age, becoming “magic” when he enters Sugar’s dream.

Furthermore, Sugar recognizes the mermaid as Bobo, and immediately after the dream, Sugar “woke up, he leaped from his bed and dressed hurriedly and ran down to the real-life pier on the lake bank and stood and scanned the waters with this innocent hope in his heart” (Nordan 183). Soon after, Sweet Austin arrives, and the two boys Bobo’s song

lures the two boys to the body.⁸⁸ Given the effects of Bobo's song, it is the power of the *loa* that draws the two boys, not the power of a black child, much less a dead black child.

This racial disassociation also is seen in the character The Rider. First, The Rider's race is carefully subverted and erased, the only reference being the detail that "[a] couple of guitar players were there, [Red's Good Lookin Bar and Gro.—a white establishment] too, *black men*, out on the porch this morning, sitting in cane-bottom chairs with their big boxes, blues *singers*" (Nordan 24). Thus, the two men are firmly identified, both racially and occupationally. Shortly after this, Nordan writes, "[o]ne of the singers sang" (Nordan 24). This man is identified as Blue John Jackson. The second man is identified as The Rider, yet Nordan claims "[t]he other man, he didn't sing" (Nordan 24). While Nordan likely is implying the man wasn't singing at the time, the phrasing does create some doubt and confusion about the man's identity and race, and this confusion is compounded when we later learn that The Rider rarely speaks. Hence, Nordan leaves the possibility open that The Rider is not the second man, nor is he black. If he is black, then Nordan also plays with race through erasure, for he is described as an albino with "pale, pale skin and white nappy hair and split lips. He didn't hardly talk. He wore him some dark shades, day and night, because his eyes was pink" (Nordan 24). This disassociation, then, brings the religion closer to whites. The Rider's name furthers the disassociation. When Voodoo spirits possess humans, they are referred to as Riders, and the humans the mounts or horses.⁸⁹ The Rider's association with the *loas* places the emphasis not on race, but rather on the religion itself. For whites, this makes The Rider a more credible figure from whom they can adopt Voodoo.

The Rider also is transformed when he is referred to as a *zombi*.⁹⁰ That he is a *zombi* (the result of a Voodoo priest or *boko* reviving the dead) is a myth the townspeople spread.⁹¹ Métraux claims *zombis* have no mind or will of their own, and the *boko* who brings the *zombi* back completely controls it.⁹² Given his name and his autonomy, it's doubtful that The Rider is an actual *zombi*. What is more probable is that The Rider is associated with Li Gran Zombi (also called Damballah-Wedo).⁹³ Glassman describes Damballah-Wedo as "[a]ll consumed in white. Danbala is inarticulate, unapproachable. . . . The serpent does not speak in words" (99). An albino, The Rider is automatically associated with a whiteness, as is Li Gran Zombi/Damballah-Wedo. This emphasis on his lack of pigmentation occurs three times, even though The Rider only appears twice in the work.⁹⁴ What's more, Métraux notes that those the god possesses make "staccato sounds which pass for the language of the snake" (231). Similarly, The Rider only utters one sound, which is the staccato-sounding "heh, heh, heh" of his laugh.⁹⁵ Thus, it is only through The Rider's transformation into a "white" *loa* that he conveys Voodoo to whites. Conflating his identity with that of a *loa*, the townspeople give him a position of power and authority he would lack as a black man. The Rider's influence, though, does not bring transformation to those who encounter him/it, but rather highlights the community's racial tension and the prejudices that set Bobo's murderers in motion. In this sense, The Rider's transformation also foreshadows the later, racially motivated violence (Bobo's murder) as well as pinpoints the community's need for change.

It is Voodoo's magic, through Bobo's bodily and racial metamorphosis, that effects individual change in racial views and views of the self. We see this change in

Sugar and Sweet, who must confront racial issues, including those related to their own sense of self. As Mark M. Leach says, “[w]hite racial identity, as currently conceptualized . . . does not seem to emphasize a person’s connectedness with the white racial group. Instead, white identity seems largely determined on the basis of the valence of white reactions to the racial out-group” (68).⁹⁶ Exemplifying this view of white identity, Sugar and Sweet are naïve, never having had to think about race or racial identity. Views of black inferiority surround the boys, and racial epithets litter white speech.⁹⁷ Bobo, though, knows the boys will change. Before they find his body, Bobo refers to the boys as “frightened children” (Nordan 183), and as they approach the body, he sings “[d]on’t look, don’t look at me, preserve your innocence another moment longer” (Nordan 186). The instant they find Bobo’s body, they are shocked out of their naïveté, and their inherited views of the black race no longer fit. At this point, Bobo sings to the boys, “*I am the mermaid, I am the lake angel, I am the darkness you have been looking for all your sad lives*” (Nordan 184). Here, Bobo conflates his identity as a *loa* and his black, racial identity. Bobo’s darkness changes the boys—both the literal darkness of Bobo’s skin and the figurative darkness in the murderers’ hearts. Bobo’s choice of Sugar and Sweet, in this light, speaks to changes needed in race relations. Impressionable young boys, the “darkness” of white violence toward blacks horrifies the two, and they reject such views of race.

Their eyes opened to racial violence and injustice, the boys now must reconceptualize racial ideology. Bobo’s vision reveals that “Sweet’s mama would not come home on this night when Sweet needed her most, not until after the white boy was

already deep in his horrible sleep” (Nordan 185-86). Signifying the depths to which the murder has shaken him, Sweet can no longer avoid racial issues. Each boy’s absence from school the next day also speaks volumes, indicating the traumatic and sickening effect Bobo’s murder and the discovery of his mangled body had on them. While we do not see Sugar’s and Sweet’s transformations, we know from the words of others the issues each boy is wrestling with: how can race justify the murder of a child, a child their own age, a child just like them?

This transformation ripples through the school. The children initially reflect their parent’s views, refusing to address racial issues and making jokes about Bobo’s death. Classmate Smoky Viner finally silences the children. Smoky vehemently announces “[y]’all ought to be shamed of yourself, laughing about a boy got killed. . . .It ain’t right” (Nordan 205, 206). Smoky comprehends the injustice, and the racial violence horrifies him. Having laughed at the jokes earlier, Smoky now announces, “I hope I live long enough to forgive myself for that laugh. . . .I’m shamed of myself. I want to die I’m so shamed of myself” (Nordan 206). Smoky’s words shock his classmates out of their complacency and force them to confront their own views. Roy Dale, Alice’s nephew, thinks, “[m]aybe he could believe that his vile laughter at the death of a child, like himself, did not eliminate him from human hope, by its villainy” (Nordan 209). Roy Dale’s revised view draws on the similarities between himself and Bobo. Recognizing his own “villainy,” he also understands how wrong the white attitude about race is. Suddenly, the other school children see Smoky as “a boy with courage to speak words that they had not had courage even to think. They saw hope. For themselves, for the

Delta, for Mississippi, maybe the world” (Nordan 210). The transmission of Voodoo’s magic, as a result, affects those who encounter it, providing a pathway for changing cultural beliefs about race.

While the previous examples indicate the impact of Voodoo’s magic, we see how the magical brings about true hybridity in Alice Conroy. Familiar with Voodoo, Alice doesn’t explore the religion of her own volition, as Pauline does, and initially does not believe in it or its magic. Instead, the religion, through Bobo, who sees “the young schoolteacher” (Nordan 180) and reaches out to her. Looking into a tiny raindrop, Alice sees “the image of a child in the river, some river, running water anyway. She thought the child must have drowned” (Nordan 80).⁹⁸ Yet, Alice resists delving into the vision or its meaning: Voodoo and magic have no place in her life, and the child means nothing to her.⁹⁹ Only when she learns the details of Bobo’s death can she no longer deny what she saw. At this point, Alice begins questioning both the murder’s injustice and racial views. She complacently lets those thoughts go, however, believing that “[t]here was nothing else she could do, once she understood the futility of magic to change anything of importance in the world” (Nordan 159). Alice quickly adopts the idea that if magic cannot change the world’s problems, then she, as one individual, can make absolutely no difference, dismissing Voodoo and her own capabilities.

Voodoo’s magic does awaken Alice to racial injustice, despite the fact she believes magic is largely ineffective. Initiated with the first vision, Alice finds she can no longer avoid racial issues when she attends the murder trial of Solon and Lord

Montberclair (the two men responsible for Bobo's death). Seeing the sea of hostile, white faces that surround Bobo's Auntie and Uncle, Alice

[h]ated the whiteness of her own skin, she ached in her heart for the white children sitting along the balcony rail with her . . . the whiteness whose history they had never asked to participate in, to be infected by, whose racial genes they shared with . . . men in sheets holding crosses engulfed in flames. (Nordan 288)¹⁰⁰

The open hatred and hostility directed toward the black people sickens Alice.¹⁰¹ For Alice, the pain of white injustice toward and subjugation of blacks becomes unbearable.

Embracing Voodoo traditions and magic as her own, Alice comes to a new understanding of race and prejudice. First, she recites a chant for Auntie and Uncle, believing it will help them. When Runt's parrot makes a magical flight through the courtroom, she determines "the bird was the dead boy. It was Bobo—the magic of good and evil both" (Nordan 254). Through her vision and in witnessing Voodoo's power, Alice has come to understand that not all magic is "futile," and she draws on it in the courtroom, hoping to help Auntie and Uncle overcome the racial hatred she now sees in the white faces surrounding the black couple. Later, when Sally Anne, Lord Montberclair's wife, asks her if she "really believe[s] in magic," Alice responds, "I never thought I did, but I must" (Nordan 288).¹⁰² Voodoo makes Alice aware of her own power to make changes. This is apparent when she tells Sally Anne that she "should have tried" (Nordan 289). While she is referring to the fact that she did not purchase a mojo the night of Bobo's murder, she also is referring to her own inaction. She feels

guilty, believing she could have done more to save Bobo. She also is now conscious of racial inequities and the changes that need to occur. As Bhabha notes,

[s]ocial differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project—at once a vision and a construction—that takes you ‘beyond’ yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political *conditions* of the present. . . (3)¹⁰³

This is exactly what Alice does in the courtroom, as we will see, realizing the “ugliness” of whites and the cultural changes needed.

Prior to this, Alice repressed reality, blind to the world around her and continually deluding herself. She begins a dead end relationship with her college professor, Dr. Dust, refusing to admit that he would never leave his wife for her. She convinces herself, instead, that “[i]f Mrs. Dust would only be a little forgiving . . . they might be friends” (Nordan 2), and dreams that “she and Mrs. Dust might somehow, someday, trade places and then be friends” (Nordan 16). Alice deludes herself into believing these things will happen. Furthermore, she fears addressing reality and avoids facing all the pain and suffering in the world around her.¹⁰⁴ This repression is most obvious in the field trips on which she takes her fourth grade students. Never once does it cross her mind that a mortuary, the home of a severely burned classmate, or a sewage treatment plant might not be the best places to take children. Alice simply ignores everything that could cause her pain, in the process traumatizing her students.

It is in the courtroom that Alice experiences transcendence and transformation.

She senses

[a]ll that anger, all that white hatred, rage, a still, sweating, stinking, brooding, engorged building full of it. . . . Uncle could feel it. Uncle thought he was dead meat. . . . Alice knew this because she could feel it too. All that white and miserable hatred, as ancient and impersonal as geology and fear. (Nordan 227-28)

Here, she is no longer simply a white onlooker, but instead she deeply feels the black experience.¹⁰⁵ Shedding her complacency, she boldly and loudly disassociates herself from whites, “shouting through the courtroom to Uncle and Auntie, ‘Yes!. . . . We are here! We colored people are behind you!’” (Nordan 231). Alice recognizes herself when she looks at the blacks, realizing there are no significant differences between herself and them. It doesn’t even bother Alice when each and every hostile white face turns toward her. Instead, she calls even more attention to her association, waving “her arm broadly so that Uncle might see her, the one person on earth she cared whether saw her” (Nordan 231). Transformed, Alice’s view shifts in her horror at the pain the whites inflict on the blacks and her recognition of herself in them. She also challenge whites to set aside such harmful preconceptions and reevaluate their own racial ideas.

Stewart and Class-Based Hybridity

After his birth in Texas in 1965, Stewart's single parent mother soon moved him to Canada in 1968. From this point forward, he spent summers with his grandparents in Texas and winters with his mother in Canada. Stewart's novels include magical realism, science fiction, and fantasy, often in combination. Returning to Houston in 1995, Stewart knew he had to set his next novel there: "part of the point was to write about the city while it was still fresh to me through that double vision of childhood familiar/adult strange" (Stewart "Re: Mockingbird" par. 6). Stewart calls Houston an "INTENSELY hybridized" city, impacted largely through its geographic location (nearness to New Orleans and Mexico). Stewart says of Houston/*Mockingbird* that the

voodoo isn't, obviously, coming directly from Haiti, but rather a through-the-looking-glass example of the fact that Houston's soul is much more strongly marked by New Orleans than by Dallas, San Antonio, or other major cities of Texas. Houston isn't like a little New Orleans, but even before Katrina there were a huge number of NO expats living in Houston. It's as if the two cities are in adjoining rooms in a cheap motel and the sound and feel and vibe of New Orleans is always leaking murkily through the thin walls. ("Re: Mockingbird" par. 4)

For Stewart, Houston's widely varied cultural traditions and hybridity add to its vibrancy, which comes through in *Mockingbird*.¹⁰⁶

In the novel, he also illustrates how class distinctions can either aid or hinder white hybridity. Speaking generally about Houston/Texas, Stewart says,

[p]art of the truth about race in [T]exas is that it is made complex by class. I am about to speak not on the Authority of Learned Authors in the Social Sciences, but rather from the experience of my own cousins and kin. If you are white and urban, race begins to blur as you get poor. I'm not saying you are less likely to get in race trouble when you're poor . . . but the realities of the underclass make a kind of melting pot where more . . . [cultural/racial mixing] occurs than in the middle class, where the lines are more rigidly held. My family in the middle classes might be on friendly terms with individuals who are black or . . . Hispanic; but my cousins who are in the lupenproletariat idealize black gangsta rappers and dream of owning Mercedes & bling—a kind of mixing of dreams and ambitions that absolutely would NOT happen higher up the socioeconomic ladder. (“Re: Mockingbird” par. 9)

This class issue and its relation to hybridity is reflected in the novel's characters. Elena, who comes from a poorer class, initially is the novel's best example of white hybridity, freely adopting and adapting Voodoo into her life. As a waitress in a bar, her daughter Candy is a member of the same class and is equally as hybrid. Toni, Elena's oldest daughter, escapes (or at least tries to escape) her class origins, attending college and attaining a white collar career. Consequently, Toni struggles with ideas of the Other and rejects familial cultural traditions that would bring about hybridity. As Stewart shows in the novel, class influences ideas of the Other. Elevating herself, Toni now views her mother as Other, and as such, both she and her Voodoo traditions are beneath Toni. Like Alice, Toni resists Voodoo, but in Toni's case, it is not because she doesn't believe, but because she lets her fears and insecurities overwhelm her.¹⁰⁷

These class distinctions, to be sure, play a significant role in the novel's racial blurring. As in *Kingdom* and *Wolf Whistle*, this distortion indicates how Voodoo is conveyed and how white hybridity is achieved; however, class signifies the ease (or difficulty) in which this occurs. Not only is Voodoo firmly entrenched in the lower-

middle class white Beauchamp family, but also their race blurred. First, details are omitted that would distinguish the family as white. In fact, the family's race is never mentioned. Instead, (excluding Elena) Stewart paints a picture of a "typical" lower-middle class family.¹⁰⁸ Both the family and lifestyle Stewart depicts are nondescript; he simply locates the family class-wise, with the Houston neighborhood they live in befitting this class. Even the names give no absolute racial clues. The mother is Elena, the daughters are Antoinette (Toni) and Candace Jane (Candy), and the last name is Beauchamp. While many of the names sound French, there is nothing that definitively indicates the family has any French ancestry. We also are informed that Beauchamp is actually pronounced "BEECH-um," (Stewart 4) removing the French accent from the name. This omission of distinguishing racial details is particularly obvious when a family friend, Mary Jo, explains the commonality of using a particular racial epithet as a child, telling Toni that she "[d]idn't mean anything by it. Like calling you a, a . . . I don't know'" (Stewart 114). Just when Mary Jo is about to reveal the family's race, she cuts off her speech. Mary Jo's inability to find a racial term fitting Toni indicates two possibilities: 1) that she also is unsure of the family's race and/or 2) that there is not a similar term fitting the family's race. In either case, the race remains blurred.

Establishing the family's race as white, therefore, requires a process of disassociation. For this reason, we must note the links Stewart makes between family members and other races. At one point, Toni says of her mother's fingernails, "I still remember every color of her nail polish: pearl, pink, carmine, true red, scarlet, and gold too and silver, like the black girls wear" (Stewart 9). Rather than saying Elena (and by

extension her family) is white, she merely compares one tiny aspect to that of “black girls.” The use of *like* in the comparison also establishes that the family is not black. A similar comparison is made of Candy. After their mother’s funeral, Toni says that “[i]n her plain black funeral dress Candy looked like a young Mexican widow, with her dark eyes and pale skin and her hair pinned up señora style” (Stewart 16). Again, we see the same use of *like* to disassociate the family from that race.¹⁰⁹ Class distinctions also come into play in these associations, for it is Candy and Elena whose races Stewart blurs the most through various racial links. Reinforcing their hybridity, both Elena and Candy easily adapt to and adopt other cultures and cultural traditions; they are not any one thing, but an amalgamation of many, hence the omission of racial identifiers. On the other hand, Stewart portrays Toni, who is trying to live a higher class life and who is rejecting her mother’s traditions, as having no other race associated with her.¹¹⁰ ¹ As Stewart slyly comments,

[t]he book seems to be fascinated by certain kinds of otherness, and scared of them at the same time; you have to assume there is a reason that Toni, the more rigid sister, also has the fewest of those inter-racial markers, while Candy is clearly associated with Hispanic culture and Elena with some blurred echo of the black experience coming out of New Orleans. (“RE: Mockingbird” par. 24)

Toni’s lack of associations to other races, as well as her resistance to her mother’s Voodoo, points to her dissatisfaction with and abandonment of her family’s class.

In this vein, the blurring of racial characteristics perfectly fits the blending that occurs in the family’s own variation of Voodoo.¹¹¹ The first descriptions of Elena’s

Voodoo resemble its customary practices. Elena is “mounted” and the Voodoo spirits ride her.¹¹² She also creates her own zombi. The zombi’s creation also reveals where Elena learned her Voodoo, for she does “something she had seen in New Orleans when she was younger” (Stewart 3). While Stewart does root Elena’s Voodoo in New Orleans, this is where the similarities end.¹¹³ Just as the family adopts and blends various racial characteristics, so do they adapt and alter Voodoo, modifying it to fit the white family. For example, the zombie is Candy and Toni’s dead pet frog, who once resuscitated, “wasn’t really alive. He never ate, he never sang. He just staggered after us as if hungry for our warmth” (Stewart 3). Rather than creating a zombie in the customary sense and for the customary use, Elena inadvertently creates a zombie frog while trying to comfort her daughters. Elena’s Riders also are not traditional Voodoo *loa*. While there are some minor similarities to miscellaneous *loa*, there are no similarities that definitively link Elena’s (and later Toni’s) Riders to those of Voodoo.¹¹⁴ Additionally, while there are literally hundreds of Voodoo *loa*, the Beauchamps only have seven: the Mockingbird, the Widow, the Preacher, Sugar, Mr. Copper, Pierrot, and the Little Lost Girl.¹¹⁵ Reworking the religion to fit their particular needs, each of the Riders represents issues concerning the Beauchamp family—reflection, morality, sexuality, laughter, direction, material wealth, and locating place within society.

This creation of culture is even more apparent through the way Voodoo is passed down in the family. Unlike traditional Voodoo, which is learned, Elena literally passes the practice to Toni. Toni, who has no experience whatsoever with Voodoo practices (other than those she’s witnessed her mother perform), has absolutely no interest in the

religion. Elena, though, leaves a liqueur called Mockingbird Cordial with explicit instructions that only Toni drink it.¹¹⁶ After drinking the cordial, Toni inherits the Riders, as it opens the pathways for her possession. Unlike Candy, however, Toni is not receptive to possession, something that is required for it to occur in standard Voodoo.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, Candy, who is receptive, cannot be possessed.¹¹⁸ The significance lies in the fact that Voodoo is transmitted to Toni despite her resistance. In reinscribing Voodoo as something inherited, rather than learned, Stewart pinpoints the way culture and tradition are invented; they are neither static, nor originary, but instead transitory and adaptable.

Still rejecting Voodoo, Toni initially does not realize that the Riders are trying to help her. What we discover is that each time she lets her fears consume her, the Riders take possession of her body. This first occurs when Toni represses her femininity and sexuality. She dresses frumpily, considering herself the “plain” sister and even telling Candy, “[i]t’s not your fault you’re pretty” (Stewart 69). In fact, food becomes her solace, and Toni eats as a “way of killing time, of dulling my spirit” (Stewart 56). Continually finding herself lacking, Sugar possesses Toni at the mall, taking her on a shopping spree. When Toni comes to, she is “wearing a skirt so short it showed the top of a black stocking at the hem. . . .And garters. . . .And a pair of panties you could mistake for Kleenex” (Stewart 68). Toni is horrified. She hates being out of control, for the Riders “did what they wanted and I couldn’t stop them” (Stewart 135). She does not realize that Sugar is trying to boost her low self-esteem. Only later does she realize the Riders actually are helping her. Desperate for money, Toni begins dabbling in the stock

market. Yet, again, her fears take over, and she makes hesitant purchases that bring little money. At this point, Mr. Copper takes control, earning her a \$13,000 profit. Not only does Toni realize the Riders are assisting her, but also she sees how debilitating her fears are. For example, after discovering Mr. Copper's latest stock purchase, she fears the worst and immediately calls her broker. As she says after hanging up on the broker, "Mr. Copper had put me in a position to win, and all I was doing was trying not to lose" (Stewart 208). This is not to say that the Riders make her rich, but rather that they give her a start, earning her enough money to pay her bills and giving her the confidence to make her own stock decisions. Prior to the Riders' help, Toni had always viewed both her mother and her Voodoo negatively, but afterward she begins to reevaluate and change her beliefs.

As noted earlier, Toni represses everything she fears and rejects everything she associates with her mother. Through Toni's repression, we see the way Stewart plays with the idea of the Other, for Toni's is her mother—a woman who is the same race and who comes from the same culture as Toni. Toni knows Elena's Voodoo and magic separate her from the rest of society, at least "normal" society, making her something Other. She also despises her mother's gifts, viewing her as inferior.¹¹⁹ Fearing both Elena's Voodoo and her instability, Toni distances herself from everything Elena stands for; where her mother is unpredictable and full of creative energy, Toni prides herself on being responsible and logical, even choosing a career as an actuary to further separate herself.¹²⁰ As Toni claims, "I am my mother's daughter only in DNA" (Stewart 4). Her fear makes her repress all characteristics in herself that resemble Elena. In turn, she

projects these fears onto her mother.¹²¹ After the Riders possess her, the now pregnant Toni worries, “[w]hat if I were doomed to be every bit as crazy a Momma. Crazier, maybe. . . .If it hadn’t been for Momma’s demons, I was sure I could be a good mother. Well, decent. Well, better than mine, anyway” (Stewart 135).¹²² Toni highlights her own fears and insecurities, and her repression only exacerbates those fears.

Toni’s repression also carries over to her cultural heritage. After her mother’s funeral, Toni wants nothing more than to “[l]eave the prayers and possession and the Riders in the wardrobe, the stories of Sugar and the Widow and the Little Lost Girl—leave all that buried with Momma. . . .Buried with her where they belong” (Stewart 4). Believing Voodoo made her mother the way she was, and believing she is nothing like her mother, Toni feels that she only can move on with her life if she puts the religion behind her. To do so, she literally and figuratively shuts the door on the chifforobe that contains the Riders’ doll-like representations. Once the doors are shut, Toni experiences “a wonderful lightness” (Stewart 15). This lightness is transitory, however, and she soon finds that she can’t part with the dolls, even when offered a large sum of cash for them. Toni doesn’t understand that she cannot rid herself so easily; both her mother and Voodoo are a part of her as well as representations of the fear she won’t address, fear that prohibits her from fully knowing and understanding herself.

Accordingly, all her fears and insecurities burst to the surface. Toni’s actions, or rather her inaction, stemming from her insecurity about her physical appearance, first pinpoint her fears. Every time she looks at herself, she finds herself lacking, especially when she contrasts her appearance with that of Candy, whom she sees as an exceptionally

beautiful woman.¹²³ Finding nothing appealing in herself, Toni gives up on dating, instead burying herself in her work. In fact, it is the rigid and absolute control over every aspect of her life that keeps her fears in check. However, when she loses her job, she also loses that control, and it is at this point that she lets her fears consume her. Toni spends countless hours researching new positions, yet she cannot bring herself to apply for any jobs. Soon, Toni becomes paralyzed, relating that “[i]nstead of daring to make more money, I started spending less. . . .I stopped going out to the movies and then I stopped going out at all, staying home to eat crackers and watch the little green lizards creep across the tile floor” (Stewart 105). Through her repression, Toni only intensifies her fear until it becomes crippling.¹²⁴

Accepting Elena’s cultural heritage, Toni finally sets these fears aside, experiencing transcendence and transformation. First, she comes to understand her mother, realizing Elena was the Little Lost Girl of all her stories, the child always searching for her home and family. Repainting her house to match that of the Little Lost Girl, Toni wants to give her mother the home she had always been searching for. Toni also finally comprehends her heritage—that Elena used her Voodoo to help her family and friends and that the magic can positively affect both her own and others’ lives. Consequently, when Toni’s daughter is born, she immediately gives the baby her mother’s gifts, including

the Riders, the Preacher in the strength of his convictions, and Sugar in the fullness of her desires. May she have Mr. Copper’s power to claim what she wants, and the vigilance of the Widow to watch her and keep her. I bless her with Pierrot’s luck, if not his temperament, and hope she can laugh, even in the

darkness. (Stewart 277)

Reintegrating into herself all the aspects of her mother she had previously repressed, Toni now better understands her own identity. As she says, “I used to think there was only one true person living in a body. . . .Now I know I was wrong” (Stewart 278). Toni also realizes that she “will never be able to separate my mother from myself. As long as I live, then a part of her lives too” (Stewart 278). Integrating all she had formerly repressed, Toni finally understands her mother and recognizes how all she thought of as Other is an essential part of herself.

These new realizations lead to Toni’s transformation. First, she revises her view of her mother. Toni now is aware of the struggles her mother underwent, never comprehending before that the stories about the little lost girl were about Elena or all that her mother did to make a better life for her children and herself. She also recognizes her mother’s strength, regretfully wishing

I could have made life easier for my mother. . . .I could see now how hard it must have been for her. How hard. Gods whispering inside her head and a little girl lost in the cold, cold north. And me, who should have been some comfort to her. But instead I was the hatefulest child. And no way now to make it up to her. (Stewart 213)

Belatedly, Toni sees that neither her mother’s lower class nor her Voodoo makes her inferior, and she calls on Elena’s voice to tell her story, saying, “it [the story] is Elena’s song, and I am the mockingbird who sings it” (Stewart 278). Her revised view of her

mother also lets her reassess herself. She stops battling all the characteristics in herself that she associated with her mother, instead blending them into herself. She delights in the fact that “I had found a way to combine my head for numbers with Momma’s gift for prophecy” (Stewart 209). No longer viewing Elena, her Voodoo or its magic as a detriment, Toni cherishes the gifts “which have been given so richly to me all my life” (Stewart 277). In reintegrating these aspects of her mother into herself, Toni is transformed, becoming a stronger woman capable of succeeding on her own and willing to take chances that her fear of failure previously prevented.

In all three texts, magical realism, through Voodoo’s magic, brings about hybridity, which, in turn transforms the characters, providing the pathway for their reconceptualization of the Other. As we have seen, the ideas I put forth about hybridity vary immensely from those of Bhabha. Bhabha sees hybridity as denoting cultural difference. Those who become hybrid are oppressed and do so out of self-preservation—they must adopt certain aspects of the oppressor, yet they also must maintain their own culture. Thus, Bhabha also sees hybridity as a constant state of flux; hybridity is a never-ending battle to adopt and adapt in order to appease the dominant group and to maintain cultural beliefs and traditions. However, in the examples I put forth in this chapter, it is someone from a dominant group who becomes hybrid. In this fashion, hybridity is a sign of cultural diversity, rather than cultural difference, and is indicative of each character’s growth. The outcome and those affected, though, do differ. In *The Kingdom of this World*, only one character, Pauline Bonaparte, adopts Voodoo. The emphasis on her links to the blacks insinuates this is why Pauline is more open to Voodoo than the other

French colonists. Even while the French colonists see no power in the religion, Pauline does, embracing the religion. Despite adopting Voodoo, it is obvious that Pauline does not experience a permanent transformation as do characters in the later novels. Her acceptance is conditional, based on her fear of losing her husband. We see Pauline's temporary transformation not only in her adoption of Voodoo, but also in the way both her view and treatment of Soliman changes. Since her transformation, based on the idea of Voodoo rather than its magic, is only temporary, she abandons all when she leaves the island.

On the other hand, Nordan's magical realism, through Voodoo, highlights the racial tensions of 1950s Mississippi and pinpoints the needed changes in race relations. Voodoo penetrates the white community, and characters who encounter its magic are forced to rethink racial ideologies. We see this ideological reevaluation when Bobo, as the *loa* Lasirèn, conveys Voodoo to the white Sugar and Sweet. Leading the two boys to his body, he violently awakens them to the injustices and horror of racial prejudice, and this response sweeps through the community. Alice's experience with Voodoo's magic paves the way for her own transformation; as her eyes are opened to the similarities between herself and the blacks, she comes to despise the hatred directed at them and understand her own abilities to effect change. *Mockingbird's* Toni also must accept Voodoo's magic for her transformation to occur. Initially, she views her mother as inferior, repressing all similar characteristics in herself. Once she embraces her cultural heritage, she realizes that her mother is an inseparable part of herself. Toni also recognizes that the cultural heritage Elena passed on to her makes her stronger.

Transformed, she understands herself in a way she never did before. She no longer needs to be the frightened little girl, hiding behind facts and figures, but becomes a strong woman cognizant both of her own abilities and of the many different identities (mother, daughter, career woman, etc.) that make her who she is.

CHAPTER III

THE MAGIC OF GENDER: BODY STEREOTYPE AND METAMORPHOSIS IN PHILIP ROTH, ANGELA CARTER, AND DOUG RICE

The previous chapter looked into how the magical, acting as a cultural agent, transforms views of identity and ideologies about the Other. Voodoo's magic brings about a white hybridity. This hybridity, in turn, helps tear down hierarchies as white characters reassess racial ideas and come to see the similarities between themselves and the Other. In this chapter, we will continue our examination of magical realism's cultural agency, this time focusing on how metamorphosis affects views of gender identity. Situated in radically different time frames, Philip Roth's *The Breast* (1972), Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1979), and Doug Rice's *The Blood of Mugwump: A Tiresian Tale of Incest* (1996) confront the nature of gender identity and roles. The author's use of the magical realism awakens characters to the gender stereotypes that permeate society, and, in many cases, even color the character's own thoughts. Through each character's metamorphosis into a female or the feminine (in Kepesh's case, a breast), Roth's David Alan Kepesh, Carter's Evelyn/Eve, and Rice's Doug come to recognize gender as performative and socially constructed.¹²⁵ The metamorphoses point to the way each character struggles with his/her time period's essentialist gender views—the patriarchal values and power roles as well as the way power is tied to gender's

enactment. For Kepesh, who is transformed into a giant breast, feminism scares him, and he clings to rigid, patriarchal ideals. Evelyn, who undergoes a forced metamorphosis into a woman, also must contemplate the influence of masculine ideology, particularly as related to the subversion of women. Doug, on the other hand, battles the remaining outdated gender views, views that are remnants of patriarchal power. It is magical realism—in this case, each character’s metamorphosis—that forces Kepesh, Eve, and Doug to address pertinent gender issues of their time period, and, as we will see, illustrate the truth about binary gender and “true” gender identity.¹²⁶

Magical realism is the perfect vehicle for each author’s investigation of gender. First, as both Wendy B. Faris and Theo L. D’haen note, magical realism regularly concerns itself with political, social, and cultural issues, issues often tied to historicity and specific dominant ideologies.¹²⁷ As D’haen comments, authors frequently use the style not to

duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical and philosophical tenets underlying said movements [the ideas a particular magical realist work is critiquing], but rather to create an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this “reality” depends on. (195)

It is this “corrective” regarding gender views that the metamorphosis in Roth’s *The Breast*, Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*, and Rice’s *The Blood of Mugwump* produce. Furthermore, the metamorphoses critique as well as attempt to correct political, social, and cultural issues linked to gender: those of gender’s construction, of power issues, and of gender identity. That two of the authors addressing these concerns are male also is not

surprising. According to D'haen, magical realism “reveals itself as a ruse to invade and take over dominant discourse” not only for “authors not sharing in, or not writing from the perspective of, the privileged centers,” but also “for writers coming from the privileged centers” as a way “to dissociate themselves from their own discourses of power, and to speak on behalf of the ex-centric and un-privileged” (195). While both the male and female authors employ magical realism as a critique of both gender discourse and ideology, Carter’s feminine perspective does provide a sharp contrast to those of Roth and Rice. Roth’s Kepesh, although his metamorphosis greatly enlightens him, as we will see, never fully detaches himself from certain views, and Rice’s own views, as well as those of his character Doug, display the author’s knowledge that he, as a male, can write the body but cannot write woman’s body.

In addition to magical realism’s critique of social and cultural issues, the style often raises questions about identity. According to Faris, magical realism is “particularly effective” at addressing identity issues because “it operates from within; the magic questions individual identity from a realistically rendered historical fiction and a realistically detailed character” (27). Faris also notes the style’s connection to feminism. Speaking of the style’s “narrative properties,” Faris says that because magical realism

is a hybrid mode combining realism and the fantastic . . . [it] can be seen to embody (largely French) feminist ideas about women’s discourse as reflecting women’s experience of belonging to a sex that is, in Luce Irigaray’s words, “not one,” and to begin to erode a dualistic mode of thinking that draws clear boundaries between self and others, and erosion that has been associated with some strains of female writing. (170-71)

Thus, magical realism helps strip away essentialist gender views that stereotypically lump women into a (primarily male) predetermined way of being and acting. As I will illustrate, it is not only female writing, but also male writing that utilizes magical realism to tear down preconceived notions of gender identity as well as binary gender distinctions. Wanting to draw on both male and female perspectives, I have also included British author Angela Carter's novel *The Passion of New Eve* in this chapter's discussion. First, my interest was in male to female transformations, of which there are few found in Postmodern literature. While I could have focused solely on Roth's and Rice's works, I felt the gender discussion needed not only a male, but also a female perspective. In the end, Carter's work was the only one that fit both criteria. As we will see, each author delves into the impact gender identity has on overall identity, the metamorphoses showing each character the harm in upholding "traditional" dichotomies of male/female, masculine/feminine, and all associated ideas of power. Metamorphosis is an excellent avenue for this appraisal, for, as Faris posits,

the linguistic magic that is enacted on bodies in some of these magical realist fictions in which flesh is literally inscribed with or transformed by an idea . . . may partially undermine the distinction between mind and body, idea and corporality. . . .to experience something in one's body is to know it in a particular way, and even more significantly, to identify with an object of knowledge such as a historical process or another person by interacting with it bodily rather than observing it from a position of objective detachment changes one's knowledge of that object. (190)

Consequently, the magical, in this case metamorphosis, forces each character out of the male body of which they are familiar. This disassociation, then, means they must

confront the feminine, recognize the fallacies tied to ideas of gender and gender identity, and reincorporate this new knowledge into the self.¹²⁸

Enacting Masculinity and Femininity

Through magical realism, in these instances a magical metamorphosis, the three authors enact transgendering in their central characters and, as we will see, critique gender's performativity and social construction. It is important, for this reason, to examine the concept of transgender. Transgender describes "anyone who lives a gender they were not perinatally assigned or that is not publicly recognizable within Western cultures' binary gender systems" (Heyes 1093). Elizabeth Reis expands on this idea, calling transgender "an umbrella term encompassing a broad range of gender-bending practices, including cross-dressing, transsexuality, drag performativity, and the like" (168).¹²⁹ Metamorphoses place transgenderism at the core of *The Breast*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and *The Blood of Mugwump*. First, as Kepesh, Evelyn, and Doug change from male to female, each character becomes a transsexual. While in traditional modes, transsexuals are those who voluntarily undergo surgery and/or hormone therapy to more closely resemble or become the opposite gender, each character does so magically through metamorphosis.¹³⁰ The transformations of Kepesh, Evelyn, and Doug push their transgendered nature to the forefront. In doing so, the characters must confront both their own and societal conceptions of gender construction

Magical realism; therefore, highlights gender's performativity and social construction, which are pivotal in each novel. The idea that gender is performative and socially constructed is well-established among gender scholars. As Judith Butler posits,

[a]cts, gestures, and desires produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body. . . .Such acts, gestures, enactments generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. . . .In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (173)¹³¹

Hence, gender is composed through imitations of the masculine and feminine gender performances that we see around us. Men and women, as a result of these imitative acts, ascribe to a set of firmly entrenched codes for gender behavior. Butler cites drag queens as a perfect example of gender performance, as their “parodic” imitations of gender indicate its performative nature, thereby also denying “hegemonic culture” its claims of “natural” gender.¹³² She believes these imitations allow us to reconceive gender “as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction” (176). It is only in recognizing and deconstructing performativity, then, that we can begin to understand gender.

Tied directly to social construction, performativity is based on cultural conceptions of gender. Gender is created communally, according to this theory, and

reflects the particular culture in which a man or woman lives, i.e. how culture perceives gender and gender roles is how they are enacted.¹³³ In view of this theory, Butler writes,

“the body” appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. . . .Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender. . . (12-13).

Therefore, subjective data that has no object reference informs many gender terms, including masculine and feminine—more simply, culturally perceived gender differences compose the meaning of these terms. Eva Waniek corroborates this view, observing that the terms “man” and “woman” are largely subjective, lending the terms to socially constructed definitions.¹³⁴

It is magical realism, via magical metamorphoses, that allows each character to examine these aspects of gender.¹³⁵ Before their transformations, neither Kepesh nor Evelyn questions what composes manhood or masculinity. Rather, both simply follow the cultural models around them. This is clear in Kepesh’s dismay over his lost sexual appetite. He claims that

the strong lust that her [Claire’s] physical beauty had aroused in me during the first two years of our affair had been steadily on the wane for a year now until, lately, I had come to make love to her two, maybe three times a month, and then, as often as not, at her provocation. (Roth 7)

Kepesh fears that his inability to perform sexually will negatively affect his relationship with Claire.¹³⁶ His fixation on his lost sexual appetite, however, indicates that he is more afraid of what it means for his sense of manhood. In this fashion, Roth plays with the idea of performativity: unable to perform sexually, Kepesh cannot perform masculinity. Shown in the way Evelyn treats Leilah, his girlfriend, Evelyn also subscribes to a pre-coded masculinity before his metamorphosis. He never once thinks about her feelings, abusing and mistreating her until he grows bored. Then he simply abandons her. Rice's Doug constantly and comfortably transforms into a woman and back again, yet one of his primary concerns is exploring gender identity and construction. Rice, who finds gender labels too restrictive, says much of his work "was written out of a struggle to understand my own uncertainties about gender and desire. . . .I have never believed in my [Rice is referring to himself] own sex (that of a biological male) nor have I felt that I am a woman 'trapped' inside the body of a man" (par. 1). Doug then, reflecting Rice's views, delves deeper into gender's makeup.

Kepesh, to be sure, comes to his own realizations about performativity shortly after his transformation. As a breast, he can no longer use sight to evaluate those around him. Instead, he must rely solely on what he hears, and he quickly picks up on the performances the men around him give. This is apparent with his father. When his father drones on about trivial information, Kepesh says, "[o]h, Dad, I think to say, wonders never cease . . . But I would not dream of making such a stupid crack to him: his performance is too awesome for that" (Roth 37). Kepesh comprehends how his father's performance is an integral part of his masculinity, for his father's chatter keeps him from

addressing the more pressing issue at hand: his son's transformation into a breast. We also see the way Kepesh condones his father's masculine performance, as he finds it "awesome," rather than pathetic.¹³⁷

When his friend, Arthur Schonbrunn, comes to visit, Kepesh's views on performativity begin to change. Kepesh describes Schonbrunn as "nearly fifty, a wry, articulate man, and for an academic, uncommonly, almost alarmingly suave in manner and dress" (Roth 62).¹³⁸ While he places Schonbrunn on a pedestal, revering everything about him, he also finds certain aspects of his performance disturbing. Kepesh's comments indicate that, perhaps, Schonbrunn is trying too hard to embody masculinity. Despite regaling Schonbrunn's suave and confident demeanor, Kepesh also admits that "all this well-oiled machinery of his had always put me off some, but nonetheless it encouraged the belief that here was a man more or less his own master" (Roth 63-64). Kepesh sees that Schonbrunn is a machine, a composition of societal views of masculinity, and this composition makes him uneasy. Kepesh's use of the words "encouraged" and "more or less" belies his revised view that Schonbrunn is only suave and confident on the surface, projecting the "traditional" view of how a man should be. Furthermore, Kepesh chooses Schonbrunn as his first visitor because he knows that the performance Schonbrunn will give will be a performance that upholds Schonbrunn's idea of masculinity, and Schonbrunn's performance, like Kepesh's father's, carefully conceals emotions.¹³⁹ In fact, when choosing Schonbrunn as his first visitor, Kepesh is drawn to Schonbrunn's "strong sense of role . . . [which] led me . . . to think that he would be someone whose presence I could 'manage'" (Roth 64). Kepesh discerns exactly what

role Schonbrunn will adopt, and that he will not stray from this role. Understanding that he can easily “manage” him, Kepesh pinpoints the fact that such a rigid performance allows for the easy manipulation of those who adopt it.

Roth also plays with the idea of performativity through Kepesh’s own “performances.” Despairing over his metamorphosis and believing he is under constant observation, Kepesh says, “and now I was sobbing and howling with no regard for the camera or the spectators in the stands. . . .Or was that *why* I was carrying on so?” (Roth 53). Kepesh adapts his own performance not to fit gender roles, but to fit his particular needs. He does not fear abandoning masculinity when he releases his emotions in a “feminine” way, rather, he more fears losing his supposed audience and their imagined attention. Roth later turns performativity into a theatrical performance.¹⁴⁰ Admitting that he imitates Olivier’s Shakespearean performances, Kepesh manages to “memorize whole speeches that I could deliver with his intonation, rhythm, and interpretation” (Roth 103). Here, Roth jabs at the way gender is mimicked, for what could be more humorous than a giant breast taking his cues from Shakespearean dialogue?¹⁴¹

As with Kepesh, the magical lets Eve recognize gender’s performativity. However, post-transformation, Eve quickly realizes that she no longer knows how to enact gender.¹⁴² She clings to the masculine performance, wanting to prolong her “notional unfemininity which still remained significant to me” (Carter 84). Carter illustrates, subsequently, that there is a comfort in the conformity of gender performance. Eve becomes even more aware of performativity after the misogynistic poet, Zero, captures her for his harem. She realizes that, “in spite” of her training, “I would often

make a gesture with my hands that was out of Eve's character or exclaim with a subtly male inflection that made them [Zero and his harem] raise their eyebrows" (Carter 100-101). Eve knows that if she does not act as expected, does not live up to Zero's (and hence society's) expectations of femininity, then she will be punished.¹⁴³ Carter, therefore, shows how ingrained and dangerous these performances are. Accordingly, it is through her fear of discovery that Eve not only learns how to perform as a woman, but also comes to understand the violence inflicted on women.

Eve finds the "perfect" gender performance in her childhood idol, movie star Tristessa de St Ange. As Evelyn, he believed Tristessa, whose roles encapsulated victimized and subjugated women, to be the ultimate and most beautiful woman. When Eve discovers Tristessa actually is a man, she still cannot

think of him as a man; my confusion was perfect—as perfect as the exemplary confusion of the proud, solitary heroine who now underwent the unimaginable ordeal of a confrontation with the essential aspect of its being it had so grandly abandoned, the implicit maleness it had never been able to assimilate itself into. (Carter 128)¹⁴⁴

The feminine role Tristessa adopts is so powerful that, despite seeing Tristessa's naked, male form, Eve cannot conceptualize Tristessa as a man. Initially, Eve feels sorry that Tristessa's secret is exposed, but she soon realizes what Tristessa has done with her performance, exclaiming, "[t]hat was why he had been the perfect man's woman! He had made himself the shrine of his own desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved" (Carter 128-29). Eve comprehends that the passive, suffering female persona Tristessa adopts makes her no better than Zero, for she enacts the very masculine

ideals of femininity that lead to women's victimization.¹⁴⁵ Exposed to the inherent danger of performativity, she now realizes that conforming to such a rigid code, a code based on sexual difference and inequality, results in violence against women.

Rice's characters not only recognize gender's performativity, but also learn to take advantage of and satirize it. The elder members of the family are able to change genders by vampirically feeding off the blood of the gender they want to be, while the younger members of the family, Doug and his sister Caddie, can do so both by feeding and at will. This ability means that all members of the Mugwump family experience life as both men and women, delighting in the performances and gender expectations of others. One example of Rice's satirization of gender performance occurs when Andreas is apprehended for impersonating a bearded lady. The irony is that freak shows emphasize the freaks' normality—that is, the bearded lady, although having a decidedly masculine characteristic, would have been expected to act like the perfect woman. As a bearded lady, Andreas, then, would be giving multiple layers of performance: that of a freak, a woman, and a man pretending to be a bearded lady. Rice adds to this irony with the anonymous man who believes he “might” have had sex with Andreas, recalling that “[e]ven though Mr. Torgov acted like a lady during most of their lovemaking and seemed just like every other woman. . . . ‘At times . . . she was slightly more aggressive than he should have been’” (Rice 79).¹⁴⁶ Even during a sexual encounter, the man does not pick up on physical attributes that make Andreas a man, but rather performative attributes.

There is, on the other hand, also a fear associated with performativity, especially conforming to specific gender expectations. This fear is best illustrated through Doug. Worrying over these expectations, Doug thinks,

[i]n the horror of my thoughts . . . Dad on top of my Mom and maybe they really did make me into this world. Say this. God gave you me, I mean, a specific kind of body. You have only one body. I. My Mom fed her desires unto me in infancy. Her sentences became I. So I am man. My empty eyes took to wandering—loose, some what crazed—around my mother's body. I was nothing like her. (Rice 130)

Doug's focus on being "made" into a specific body, born a male, pinpoints the expectations that revolve around the physical form. Since his body is nothing like his mother's, the thought of always having to perform as a man horrifies him. Doug also indicates how words and language create male and female gender ideals, for it is his mother's (hence society's) words that make him male. In this way, language, the ultimate form of symbols, comes to create the very standards of gender Doug opposes. Despite society clinging to these symbols, as Doug realizes, the symbols can be torn apart and realigned. Doug knows, however, that his ability and desire to transform into a woman "go against" what he, as a man, should be. Reflecting societal views, his mother also continually harasses him about changing sexes, telling him such things as "God will kill you before He lets you go through with your plans. You will never be a woman" (Rice 26). Her comments highlight the religious enforcement of "natural" gender, since God will punish him for his transformations. Once again, it is words, or rather "the word," that creates acceptable gender behavior. His mother is actually the only family

member who never changes gender, instead conforming to a more traditional and acceptable female performance. Describing his mother, Doug says, “[s]he is a subtle sort of woman, the kind who slaughters time and space by wearing a mini skirt and by standing in just the right fashion—hand, hip, tongue” (Rice 34); hence, she appears as more of a caricature of woman than an actual woman. In this respect, Rice pinpoints how absurd gender performance can be when rigidly upheld. Through Doug, Rice also illustrates the flexibility of gender performance.

Magical realism also allows each character to see gender’s social construction. We see this with Kepesh, who begins critiquing what Ximena E. Mejía notes of masculinity: that it is not only an intrinsic property of maleness, “but also that it is an ideology that is exalted to the status of gender identity: Men are forced . . . to internalize the ideology until they experience it as an intrinsic part of their being—indeed often the very core of their personal identity” (31). The key here is Mejía’s use of the word “forced”: masculinity is not an arbitrary choice for men; rather, it is something they adopt to gain societal acceptance. Forcing this code on men, in return, has negative consequences. Mejía remarks that socialization teaches men

to avoid shame at all costs, to wear a mask of coolness, to act as though everything is going all right, as though everything is under control, even if it is not. This leads many boys and men to push themselves excessively at academic or career-related work, often in an effort to repress feelings of failure or unhappiness. . . . Men should be stoic, stable, and independent; a man never shows weakness. . . . This socialization is one of the reasons men are experiencing restricted emotionality, inability to communicate feelings, and relationship problems. (33, 32)

Ultimately, this socialization leads men to repress natural emotions.¹⁴⁷ They must “appear” a certain way at all times, and control is of the utmost importance. I quote these features at length for they are the same features Kepesh both emphasizes and critiques in his father and Schonbrunn.

This is not to say Kepesh immediately condemns masculine gender construction. Rather, he initially holds both his father and Schonbrunn up as examples, revering certain masculine conventions each man possesses such as power, drive, and composure. He admires his father’s “bravery,” amazed at his “self-possession in the face of horror, this composure in the face of the monstrous” (Roth 36).¹⁴⁸ He also regales his father’s control over his feelings, for even after Kepesh’s devastating metamorphosis, his father shows no outward emotion. Kepesh has a similar veneration for Schonbrunn. Like his father, Schonbrunn also contains and controls his emotions, which is one of the reasons Kepesh chooses him as his first visitor. Kepesh describes a man who is not only successful in the academic world, but also is ambitious for power. From the success of his first book, Schonbrunn has risen to Dean of the college, and Kepesh knows he has higher ambitions, claiming, “[p]robably, Arthur will be our president one day—of Stony Brook first, then, if his wife has her way, of the United States of America” (Roth 63). While Kepesh says this in a sardonic tone, it belies his own envy.¹⁴⁹

Kepesh soon realizes, because of his magical transformation, how costly this construction is. Transformed, he can truly “observe” the men around him for the first time. He now both reveals and understands the disappointments his father cannot bring himself to acknowledge. He knows his father, who started out a short order cook and

ended up giving his life “over to running a second-class hotel in South Fallsburg, New York” (Roth 36), never achieved the success he wanted out of life. Kepesh further stresses his father’s failure when Kepesh says that he, now retired, “‘kills time’ answering the phone mornings at his brother’s booming catering service” (Roth 36). His uncle’s successful business is set against his father’s “second-class” hotel and his unrewarding retirement. Ingrained in his notions of masculinity, his father also has no outlet for his emotions. Instead, he keeps them bottled in; his substitute for expressing emotion is the steady drone of trivial information about people he knows. While Kepesh admires his father’s adept ability to “handle” his emotions, he also sees a man trapped in societal ideals of masculinity—a man who is unable even to console his son for fear of showing emotion. Similarly, Schonbrunn cannot admit his own failure. Kepesh relates that Schonbrunn “is one of those academics . . . who produce a work of intellectual distinction in their early thirties . . . and then are never heard from again” (Roth 62). Kepesh understands that Schonbrunn’s inability to produce a second book is his failure and that he has rerouted his failure into ambition for power, needing to feel successful at all costs. As a result, he has always been able to internalize both his emotions and his failure and redirect them into a “masculine” outlet. Seeing Kepesh as a breast for the first time, Schonbrunn, however, can no longer internalize what he feels. Rather than consoling and sympathizing with Kepesh, the only outlet he can find for his emotions is through laughter. While this laughter infuriates Kepesh, we recognize Schonbrunn’s inability to cope, and he becomes pitiable in his confines, indicating, to Kepesh how gender’s social construction can be a trap if there is no flexibility.

Yet, Kepesh is unable to completely abandon such a construction, a construction Roth satirizes through the ways Kepesh tries to uphold it. Realizing he does not completely fit masculine ideals, Kepesh finds odd ways of asserting his masculinity. While he emphasizes the macho ideals of the men in his life, what he upholds in himself as masculine is a pale comparison. Kepesh characterizes himself as “a man of hearty bowel movements, dependable sexual potency, of stamina and appetite, a man six feet tall with good posture and trim physique, most of his hair and all of his teeth” (Roth 3). In this depiction, we see similar characterizations to those Kepesh makes of other men, such as strength and heartiness. However, he cannot find anything traditionally associated with the masculine in himself. The attributes he does emphasize are not only mundane, but also simply adequate, nothing like the attributes he highlights in his father and Schonbrunn. He does begin to change, nevertheless, after his metamorphosis. We see him releasing his emotions. Not caring who witnesses his eruptions, he howls and sobs over his plight.¹⁵⁰ While he abandons certain masculine conventions, it is only because, as a breast, he is forced to do so. Roth, therefore, pokes at such constructions; not only are Kepesh’s pre-transformation ideals ridiculous, but also they illustrate just how fragile and inconsequential this construction is.

As with Roth, Carter also highlights Evelyn’s ignorance. Initially, his ignorance lies in his inability to comprehend that Leilah’s bases her performance on his own views of women’s/femininity’s construction. Evelyn simply sees her as and believes her to be a vacuous, submissive, sexual toy, commenting that she “seemed to me a born victim” (Carter 28). Later, when Eve reencounters Leilah, she is now Lillith, a powerful leader in

the women's movement/army. At this point, Eve realizes "that gorgeous piece of flesh and acquiescence [had] been all the time a show, an imitation, an illusion" (Carter 172). It is only post-metamorphosis that Eve both sees and experiences the social influence on gender construction. At first, she questions the social influence's validity, and after becoming Eve, she asks Sophia, "does a change in the coloration of the rind alter the taste of the fruit? A change in the appearance will restructure the essence, Sophia assured me coolly" (Carter 68).¹⁵¹ Eve initially does not believe the change in her sex will alter her perception of herself as male.

It is at this point that Eve's psychological reprogramming begins, and she is bombarded with virginal, maternal, and vaginal imagery.¹⁵² Eve soon finds that,

at length the sense of having been Evelyn began, in spite of himself, to fade, although Eve was a creature without memory; she was an amnesiac, a stranger in the world as she was in her own body—but it wasn't that she'd forgotten everything, no. Rather, she had nothing to remember. Nothing at all but many Virgins with many Children, a mother vixen batting its cub affectionately about the ear with a maternal paw. . . (Carter 78)

Forced to watch these video tapes, they are the only directive she has for both constructing and enacting woman; therefore, it is the video version of femininity that Eve adopts. She becomes the virginal, submissive, nurturing woman in Zero's camp, giving in to Zero's sexual demands and acting as a mother to the seven other girls in his harem. Only later does Eve understand the ramifications of this construction. This understanding occurs when it is revealed that Tristessa a man. Eve suddenly realizes "[c]ircumstances had forced us both out of the selves into which we had been born and now we were no

longer human—the false universals of myth transformed us” (Carter 136). Eve now comprehends that both she and Tristessa have been made into the mythological archetypes of femininity, archetypes condoned through patriarchy, yet incompatible with women’s advancement in a male-dominated world—everything upon which she and Tristessa had modeled themselves is a fabrication designed to repress women.

For Doug, his ability to change gender at will makes him aware that gender construction is a “story,” the ultimate fiction. He references stories/storytelling forty-one times, often in relation to gender.¹⁵³ His mother even tells him not

“to waste any of your faith on her [Grandma Mugwump’s] storytelling. . . .Did Grandma actually tell you that. . . .Poppy made her into a woman out of a man just because? Think about it. Just take a moment and think about it. Then I want you to tell me if that’s at all possible? Tell me how that can be? Is that really possible? Could that be done in America? In Philadelphia?. . . .Was Rome built in a day? Is a girl made overnight? Do you honestly think so much can be forgotten so quickly just to be a girl?” (Rice 60)

Doug recognizes that it is actually his mother who is telling the story through her imposed restrictions on gender. These “fictionalized” or repressed gender ideas are something Doug frequently encounters. For example, when he is arrested, mid-transformation, looking like a man with breasts in drag, he quickly must tell the police a story, that he is actually doing research for a story he’s writing, to explain his appearance. The police officer interrogating him says, “[I]et’s imagine you’re telling us the truth about this story. Tell me what such a story of yours might be about” (Rice 19). Doug comprehends that if his gender does not conform to a typical construction, the authorities

would rather hear a fiction than the truth. However, Doug perceives a deeper truth—that gender construction itself is the real story—commenting, “[s]o many people have told stories. As if a story is the father” (Rice 131). Just as no ultimate source and truth exists in a story, neither does the concept of gender result from these; it is all merely a fabrication.

Transformed into the female/feminine, Kepesh, Eve, and Doug discover the truth about gender’s performativity and construction. Magical realism, through each character’s metamorphosis, highlights for him/her how men and women construct and perform gender based on the actions of others of their sex. While each character realizes the negative consequences that occur when rigid ideals are upheld, each author and time period dictates the characters’ views. Kepesh realizes the harm and repression that comes from adhering to a masculine performance and construction, yet he does not address what such conformity means for women, nor is he fully able to disentangle himself from this conformity. Accordingly, Roth employs magical realism to mock these ideals, for, as a breast, they fail Kepesh. Eve, on the other hand, understands that adherence is what leads to women’s subjugation, molding them into patriarchal archetypes with no will of their own. Finally, Doug exposes both as a fiction upheld out of fear. Fearing anything but traditional gender performance and construction, many of the characters Doug encounters create their own gender fiction. This fiction creates inflexible standards, boding contempt and disgust for anyone who “strays” from the traditional views. Consequently, he, as well as other gender changing members of his family, not only satirize, but also highlight the absurdity of society’s need for gender conformity.

Historicity and Power

Performativity also informs and regulates male-female power dynamics, and, not surprisingly, Kepesh, Eve, and Doug handle these power dynamics differently. Since each text reproduces the feminist issues of its time, each work must be situated, broadly, within its particular feminist movement. First, *The Breast* was written during the first strand of second wave feminism. Beginning in the mid 1960s, second wave feminism lasted until the mid 1980s and was demarcated by two strands of thought. Focused on women's sexual liberation, the first strand lasted from the mid 1960s to mid 1970s. Jane Gerhard observes that this time period's feminists, called radicals, believed that women's maternal and domestic roles had stifled their sense of self and cost them their identity.¹⁵⁴ Gerhard notes that second-wave feminism probed "the social construction of femininity, the psychological origins of patriarchy, and the political nature of sexuality" (82). For this reason, sexual freedom and the female orgasm became increasingly important to the movement, while the maternal and domestic were shunned.¹⁵⁵ Given these theories, men, of course, reacted with fear and anger, for feminists proposed a change in the power relations between the sexes. This change is precisely what maps *The Breast*. As we will see, Kepesh's struggle with gender begins after his encounter with the magical when his

power role is inverted, and much of Kepesh's struggle comes not only from having to redefine gender, but also the power roles involved.

Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* is situated in the second strand of second-wave feminism. During this time frame, feminists dismissed the idea of sexual freedom as liberating. According to Gerhard,

[a]s many Americans rejected what they viewed as the excesses of the sexual revolution, feminists started to interrogate the very terms of feminism, its political goals, its theoretical understandings of womanhood, sexuality, and equality. . . . More and more feminists began to emphasize the failures of sexual liberalism and the dangers women faced from unrestrained male sexuality. (151-52)

The idea of women's sexual freedom as empowering was abandoned, and, instead, motherhood came to be embraced as the vehicle for redefining male-female power relationships. Feminists believed the mother would replace the "patriarchal father as the basis for social relations" and would rule "society in the same way as a mother nurtured her children" (159).¹⁵⁶ These feminists, who came to be known as cultural feminists, also proposed that male social domination defined gender roles and traits, and traits thought inherently feminine were the result of women's social marginalization. They believed that this division of men as dominant and women as subordinate was harmful "because society encouraged men to reject any traits associated with the subordinates, or with women. Such traits included emotionality, intimacy, attunement, mutual dependency, and an emphasis on relationships" (Gerhard 166). Consequently, we will examine how Carter uses magical realism to illustrate the dangers of men rejecting these traits in *The*

Passion of New Eve as well as the male dominance and violence that ensue.¹⁵⁷ She does, on the other hand, satirize second wave feminism's universalization, including the idea of the mother as all-powerful. Instead, Carter holds up the mother as a mythical figure invested with patriarchal ideals of womanhood.

The Blood of Mugwump encapsulates third wave feminism. This new wave of feminist thought came about in the mid 1980s after second wave feminism's failure. Ultimately, second-wave feminism failed largely because it universalized all women's oppression. This universalization did not take into account the differences in women's experiences based on such things as class and race. For this reason, it could only appeal to white, educated, middle class women, who, Gerhard notes, "had the privilege of focusing on a single axis of identity and oppression" (99). Third wave feminism, then, embraces women's differences and has seen the emergence of diverse, cultural voices. According to Jennifer Gilley, third wave feminism focuses "on individualism" and is reluctant "to speak in an assumed—and potentially false—solidarity" (189).¹⁵⁸ Gilley adds that "[t]he celebration of the power and possibilities of contradiction is a central tenet of third-wave feminism" (189).¹⁵⁹ What this focus means is that women are free to be exactly who they want to be, even if it means barbequing while wearing a dress. She cites as an example the all-girl punk rock group Riot Grrrrl, who wear baby doll dresses, barrettes, and combat boots and have aggressive attitudes.¹⁶⁰

In recognizing and celebrating both difference and personal choice, third wave feminism has been far more successful than its predecessors. Its open door policy embraces all who consider themselves women. Second wave feminism, on the other

hand, not only excluded women of other races and classes, but also men who were transgendered or transsexual. They believed that these men were “recipients of male privilege” (191). As Gilley comments, third wave feminism is far more concerned with forming alliances than with arguing over the “category” of women. Thus, there is a unity in difference.¹⁶¹ While this unity has led to more progressive laws and views related to gender and sexuality, rampant persecution still exists.¹⁶² Amber E. Kinser feels this persecution is one area of third wave feminism that must be addressed, arguing that since many feminists have grown up in an era of more equality, they believe they are “entitled” to certain rights. However, as Kinser remarks, “a *sense* of entitlement and having the *rights* thereto are not the same power. That sense will get woman nowhere if the patriarchal social structure does not afford her the rights of that entitlement, and so far it has not done so except after unrelenting feminist insistence” (143). Thus, one of the primary problems in third wave feminism is that many in the younger generations believe the fight is won; thus, they put up no fight and provide no voice for women’s or gender rights, paving the way for abuse and persecution. Rice reflects this problem in *The Blood of Mugwump*. Time and again, as we will see, characters are rendered powerless because of their gender transformations.

The Breast, *The Passion of New Eve*, and *The Blood of Mugwump*, by means of their magical transformations, not only delve into the power issues each strand of feminism brought to the forefront, but also, often, parody both societal and feminist expectations of gender roles/performances. Kepesh, Eve, and Doug’s transformations allow them to reconceive power and gender. This reconception is first seen in *The*

Breast. As noted earlier, women's sexual liberation as well as the abandonment of maternal and domestic roles characterized the first strand of second wave feminism. Kepesh doesn't admit Claire is a feminist, but his words reveal that she is aligned with feminist beliefs. First, there is the fact that Kepesh and Claire do not marry, cohabitate, or have children. Thus, Claire does not fulfill any maternal or domestic roles for Kepesh.¹⁶³ It also is obvious that Claire is focused on and committed to her career, as she is a teacher and "Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Cornell" (Roth 46). Finally, while not completely sexually liberated, Claire does pay more attention to her own sexual needs than Kepesh's. Kepesh describes Claire as having "a passion in sex" (Roth 8) and being "wonderfully aroused by ordinary sexual practices" (Roth 43). Yet, he bemoans the fact that she refuses to reciprocate oral sex. Whether or not it is intentional, Claire does adhere to many principles of second wave feminism.

Despite Kepesh's words to the contrary, his speech and attitude often convey his dismay over the inversion of power roles that Claire's actions cause. When speaking of their relationship, he claims to be delighted with their arrangement, for it provides

the warmth and security of one another's affection, without the accompanying burden of dependence, or the grinding boredom, or the wild, unfocused yearning, or the round-the-clock strategies of deception, placation, and dominance that seemed to have soured all but a very few of the marriages we knew of. (Roth 9).

The key to his unhappiness is at the passage's beginning: Kepesh does not describe a loving relationship, but rather one more akin to a relationship between friends or family. Additionally, the words he uses to describe failed marriages in the latter half of the

passage (“grinding,” “burden,” “yearning”) sound more like a futile attempt to justify his “happiness” with Claire’s role. This attempt is even more obvious when Kepesh claims that he found “comfort with the even-tempered and predictable. If sometimes the unruffable in Claire made her less responsive and various in conversation, or in company, than I would have liked her to be, I was really much too content with her dependable sobriety to be too peeved” (Roth 8-9). Again, Kepesh makes no reference to love, only contentedness, something which carries such vague and general connotations that he could, just as easily, be expressing how he feels after a large meal. The very words he uses to describe Claire, effectively, indicate the exact “grinding boredom” that he claims they had escaped by not marrying.

Further emphasizing his belief that men should hold the power are the views he expresses about the other women in his life: his mother, his ex-wife Helen, and Schonbrunn’s wife, Debbie. He extols his dead mother’s virtues, yet continually highlights the traditional woman’s work she does. She is a “noble . . . chambermaid and cook” (Roth 37-38), and while she adeptly handles the men employed at the hotel (a hotel always referred to as Kepesh’s father’s), Kepesh also relates that she “always she went back to the kettles, back to the mops and linens” (Roth 38). Kepesh thereby relegates his mother’s strength to the traditional service works she does, i.e. a traditional performance of femininity. On the other hand, he portrays both Helen’s and Debbie’s power negatively. Kepesh despises Helen’s ability to emasculate him.¹⁶⁴ Not only does Helen send him into five years of psychoanalysis after their divorce, but also her power over him spurs his refusal to marry again.¹⁶⁵ Even after his transformation, he continually

brings her up in his therapy sessions, regaling the emotional effect she had on him. Only now it is his guilt over delighting in her misfortune.¹⁶⁶ Kepesh sees this same emasculating power in Schonbrunn's wife, Debbie. He describes her, rather unflatteringly, as "the Lady Macbeth of Long Island. . . . That she has airs enough to fill the sails of all the schooners ever anchored in the Sound, and the ambition to go with it, is not something I would care to dispute" (Roth 63). He sees Debbie as the power behind Schonbrunn, a power he does not believe she should have. This belief is amplified when, after Schonbrunn's disastrous visit, it is Debbie who sends a *Hamlet* LP. Kepesh tirades against both Debbie and the gift, calling her a "[p]retentious philistine bitch!" (Roth 67-68) and "Jacqueline-*manqué*!" (Roth 68). That he can only call her a pretentious bitch and a failed Jacqueline says much about the position in which he puts Debbie—in a position of superiority and authority. His misogynistic attitude toward women concretely illustrates his alarm over the inversion of power feminism creates as well as his desire to return to more "traditional" gender performances.

What makes Kepesh's dismay over women's power most apparent is his outright complaints. Whenever Claire does not fulfill what Kepesh views as her role, he complains. The night his transformation begins, Claire is not there for him. Kepesh moans that, "[p]erhaps if Claire had been with me that night, instead of back at her own apartment preparing some sort of committee report, I would have had the courage of my fears and told the doctor to come running" (Roth 5). Kepesh lays the blame on Claire, for in not fulfilling her maternal/domestic role, she has failed him. Kepesh also pinpoints this "failure" later when talking about their sex life. Complaining about her

unwillingness to “perform fellatio,” Kepesh laments, “I was not, you see, getting all that I wanted out of life” (Roth 43). Kepesh’s words illustrate that he is not happy with the changes second wave feminism brought about. We also see Roth satirizing the male desire for power. First, Kepesh wants a maternal Claire—not for a child, but rather for himself. Second, if Kepesh *can* get all he wants out of life through fellatio, he is, indeed, very pitiful.

Reflecting the ideas posited during the second strand of second wave feminism, *The Passion of New Eve*’s magical realism shows how the repression of traits characterized as “feminine” leads to both male dominance over and violence against women. We learn early on that Evelyn has developed “an ambivalent attitude toward women” (Carter 9); he desires Leilah, but he can never bring himself to love her. His need for power and control is so strong that desire and anger are the only emotions he is able to express. When Leilah’s own desire scares him, he ties “her to the iron bed with my belt. . . . Then I would go out and leave her to her punishment” (Carter 27), and if she “fouled” the bed while he was gone, he beats her viciously. When he tires of beating her and using her for sex, he grows bored. Learning that Leilah is pregnant, Evelyn reveals, “any remaining desire for her vanished. She became only an embarrassment to me. She became a shocking inconvenience to me” (Carter 32). He lies to her, trying to force Leilah to leave him. When that fails, Evelyn simply sits back and watches the horrors she puts her body through in her attempt to abort the baby.¹⁶⁷ His only “solution” is to abandon Leilah at a hospital and take off across the country in his car. Evelyn sees only

the submissive in Leilah, which, to him, validates his both his dominance and abusive treatment.

This sentiment is amplified in Zero, who wants absolute control over his eight wives. He mandates every aspect of their lives, from clothes to hair to food. He doesn't even allow them to speak English, making them growl and mew like animals. Zero also is incapable of loving another human.¹⁶⁸ Unfeeling, he thinks nothing of beating his wives mercilessly for the tiniest infraction of his laws.¹⁶⁹ Eve's first introduction to Zero is his rape, complete with all the other wives standing around watching. Zero believes he is "masculinity incarnate," and, as such, this means complete emotional repression and control. For both Evelyn and Zero, women become subhuman, "fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff" (Carter 87).¹⁷⁰ Zero and Evelyn, then, illustrate what happens when men repress traits associated with the feminine. The ensuing result is complete detachment from, subordination of, and violence against women.¹⁷¹ This male attitude becomes so ingrained that men do not even recognize the atrocity of their actions. Exemplified through the newly transformed Eve, after hearing Sophia's lecture about the history of male violence against women, she can only assume that "somewhere . . . I had transgressed and now I must be punished for it" (Carter 74).¹⁷² Eve has no idea how anything she did as a man could be wrong.

We also see how Carter reacts against second wave feminism's tendency to universalize. This is most obvious in her portrayal of the women's army.¹⁷³ When Evelyn first arrives in New York City, he encounters both the destruction the women's army wreaks and their symbols. His comment after seeing their symbol, that "[w]omen

are angry. Beware Women! Goodness me!” (Carter 11), holds much irony. Yes, the women are angry, but they do not espouse a particular theory or logic. Rather, they simply band together, their violence mimicking that of the patriarchal society they wish to depose. This violence targets men, and in particular, the institution of marriage.¹⁷⁴ The women’s army thus aims for the ludicrous goal of eliminating not male patriarchal dominance, but men in general. Furthermore, the women become female archetypes: they are Amazonian warriors who have sacrificed their left breast for the cause. As such, they confine themselves to the very rigid, social role they wish to eradicate.

Carter uses archetypes throughout the text to satirize both society’s and second wave feminism’s universalizing tendencies.¹⁷⁵ While she does this with such characters as the virginal/Biblical Eve, the hypermasculine Zero, and Leilah/Lillith, what is most striking is her condemnation of the mythological mother. First, everything associated with Mother in *The Passion of New Eve* is artificial. For example, Evelyn describes a room in Beulah, Mother’s self-created, womb-like haven, as having walls made of “a tough, synthetic integument with an unnatural sheen upon it that troubled me to see, it was so slick, so lifeless. Everything in the room had a curiously artificial quality” (Carter 49).¹⁷⁶ Even before we encounter the great Mother, everything associated with her is a fabrication. Then, we learn Mother is actually her own terrifying creation, grafting body parts onto herself and embodying numerous female myths—everything from Diana to Cybele.¹⁷⁷ In turning herself into the ultimate model of motherhood, the model that will replace patriarchal domination, Mother simply inverts these same patriarchal ideals onto

women.¹⁷⁸ The depiction of Mother demonstrates this inversion. She is described as having a head

teetering ponderously on the bull-like pillar of her neck, was as big and black as Marx' head in Highgate Cemetery; her face had the stern, democratic beauty of a figure on a pediment in the provincial square of a people's republic and she wore a false beard of crisp, black curls like the false beard Queen Hatshepsut of the Two Kingdoms had worn. She was fully clothed in obscene nakedness; she was breasted like a sow—she possessed two tiers of nipples. . . .And how gigantic her limbs were! Her ponderous feet were heavy enough to serve as illustrations of gravity. . . (59).

Given the parodic combination of both the patriarchal and the fertile, it is obvious that second wave feminism's mother only serves as a reminder of the pre-inscribed roles for women. This role also does nothing to invert male dominance; hence, the only thing to do with Mother is retire her to a cave at the end of the novel, thereby retiring the archetype itself.

Finally, Rice illustrates the defects found in third wave feminism. While the characters in *Blood of Mugwump* can be whoever they want to be, Rice shows how the lack of a unifying feminist voice demanding certain rights leads to the societal degradation and subordination of those deemed inferior. This degradation and subordination is particularly evident with characters arrested for performing gender incorrectly. Doug, for example, is arrested mid-transformation simply because, wearing a dress and still having breasts, he does not perform the gender (male) the police believe he should. The police officers' comments are also very telling. One asks him,

“[a]re you a transvestite? I mean, do you enjoy dressing up like a girl? Or a woman, or whatever it is? You know, maybe you’re just a cross-dresser. Maybe you want to be some kind of girl, a pervert. . . . Maybe there are other things we could be doing right at this minute to help you get better?” (Rice 22)¹⁷⁹

They believe Doug is abnormal, therefore deserving contempt and ridicule. The fact that the police actually arrest Doug also shows the lack of protection and understanding given to those who do not conform to a specific; basic rights are trampled simply because someone decides a personal choice is “wrong.” And, it is not just one instance where police make arrests related to the characters’ gender practices, for this also occurs twice with Grandma Mugwump and Torgov: once when they are both female and caught in a sexual act and once when they are both male and found kissing.¹⁸⁰ The police, in this respect, stand for the ultimate societal failure—rigidly prescribing gender roles and performances. Action must be taken to protect and promote gender rights, and these authoritarian figures represent the very outcome of such failures.

This failure carries over to the ideas different authoritarians present on gender. In each instance, one of two solutions to the gender “problem” is proposed. The first is “fixing” the gender problem. Doug’s arresting officer confirms this view, believing Doug has a problem that needs fixed. Later, the officer reechoes this sentiment, telling Doug “[t]here are all sorts of people out there who can help you. We can bring all of them in here to help *us*” (Rice 22).¹⁸¹ Interestingly, the help is not only for Doug, but also for the police (hence society) in general. The officer’s words indicate that he believes Doug’s gender confusion is something akin to a disease that can be cured. Doug risks “infecting” others if he remains “uncured.” The officer corroborates this, saying,

“‘you’re out there doing some pretty sick shit, right? You’re some sort of fucking weirdo, aren’t you? And we’re just supposed to let you go back out there? Back into the streets’” (Rice 19). Simply because he can switch genders, Doug is detained and isolated.

The second solution is just to ignore the entire issue, dismissing it as, more or less, a case of temporary insanity. We see this solution when the doctor is called in after Grandma Mugwump and Torgov are caught in a lesbian act. The doctor, Joseph P. Kane, “an authority on such modes of behavior,” decides that the two women are not lesbians because one “‘referred to her own behavior as strange. . . .Anyone acting in such a way would not have the common sense to call himself strange’” (Rice 82). Again, this authority views such gender practices as lesbianism as abnormal, for it takes “common sense” to admit such practices are “wrong.” Thus, Kane upholds the police’s binary views on gender. He also doesn’t bother to identify who the women are by name. Instead, the lesbian who admits her abnormality is only referred to as “her” or “the woman.” In committing such acts, the women lose their right to a specific identity. Kane also readily and willingly believes the woman’s story. It is far easier for him to simply dismiss the whole situation than actually address the issues, thus, in turn, forcing gender issues right back into the closet, so to speak. Without a unified voice speaking up for gender rights, they are ignored, the characters are stripped of them, and their voices are silenced.

While the texts reflect the masculine-feminine power issues of their time periods, magical realism, via her metamorphosis, allows each character to recognize and

reconceive power relations. Transformed, how each character handles and reacts to the active/passive dichotomy and to speech/language further highlights her views on power relations. Regarding passivity, Malkah Notman notes that society constructed the passive role based on women's "receptive" position during sex. Notman says that this position "was thought to be an expression of inherent female receptivity and passivity and this model for female sexuality was extended to describe personality. . . .Receptivity and passivity were thought by man to be a part of a woman's nature" (584). Much of Kepesh's struggle over power relations revolves around his view of passivity, hence his fear of feminization.¹⁸² We first see this fear prior to his transformation when he worries over his lost sexual appetite.¹⁸³ Kepesh's inability to perform distances him from traditional masculinity. Even after renewing his sexual appetite, Kepesh finds himself "writhing with pleasure, clawing at the sheets and twisting my head and shoulders in a way I had previously associated more with women than with men" (Roth 11). Despite the fact that his desire has returned, the passive and feminine connotations of that desire still disturb Kepesh. This fear is echoed when, right before his transformation, he breaks down, feeling "ashamed and *unmanned* by the way I had lost control of myself" (Roth 6).¹⁸⁴ Roth also satirizes Kepesh's fears in the way he describes his transformation as an "assault (some say) of a volcanic secretion from the pituitary of 'mammogenic fluid'" (Roth 18), for it is the "passive feminine" that has actively overtaken Kepesh's body. As Roth indicates, there is no male-female division of the active/passive; this too is a code prescribing male power. In mocking this dichotomy, Roth simultaneously ridicules this "division" and male fears of passivity.

As a breast, Kepesh's form and immobility force him into such a "feminine" passive role.¹⁸⁵ His sexual pleasure now comes "in a state of complete helplessness, in utter darkness, and from a source unknown to me, seemingly immense and dedicated solely to me and my pleasure" (Roth 24). Kepesh's receptive sexual position makes him passive in the traditional sense. Additionally, Claire "*grants*" him sexual favors, making her the active participant in their sexual relationship.¹⁸⁶ He describes himself as a container, an "utterly and blessedly helpless . . . a big brainless bag of tissue, desirable, dumb, passive, immobile, acted upon instead of acting" (Roth 87). Jessica Benjamin also observes of sexual imagery that "the body that serves as a container is associated with women, or, at least, with the feminine position. The masculine position, the active or dominant position, is correspondingly seen as that of discharging into the female body" (47). Transformed, Kepesh no longer can "discharge," claiming, "the excitement is always at the same sexual pitch, neither increasing or decreasing in intensity once it is under way" (Roth 59). Moreover, Benjamin notes that the role of male activity revolves around sexual overstimulation, which, in turn, leads to tension and excess and finally release, while "the feminine role is to embody the unwanted, primitively feared experience of helpless overstimulation and to make of it an exciting invitation" (52).¹⁸⁷ For Kepesh, there is no longer release, only the feminine overstimulation.¹⁸⁸ And while he does make an "exciting invitation" to Miss Clark, it is wholly ignored and rejected. Therefore, Kepesh becomes the very passive, feminine container of his fears.

Kepesh's metamorphosis provides the key for his incorporation of the active and passive into a more coherent whole. According to Benjamin, male trauma often initiates

this new relationship to passivity, for “the cultural schema of masculinity did not protect them [men suffering trauma]. The fabric of the ‘phallic fiction’ was torn and failed them” (54).¹⁸⁹ While Benjamin is looking specifically at men returning from war, we will not be stretching the issue to assume that Kepesh’s transformation had a similar traumatic effect. This is indicated through the way he describes his transformation, always using violent terms: “an endocrinopathic catastrophe . . . a hermaphroditic explosion. . . a volcanic secretion” (Roth 15, 18). There is also his “posttraumatic” reaction to his metamorphosis, where Kepesh reveals that he “howled so wretchedly . . . that I had to be kept under heavy sedation” (Roth 19). The trauma he experienced overflowed masculinity’s rigid limitations, and he must reevaluate the active/passive dichotomy.

To do so, he must embrace the passive, sexual role. Once he abandons himself to sexual stimulation, Kepesh finds the sensations are “delicious” and “intense . . . coming to me in a state of complete helplessness, in utter darkness” (Roth 24). He begins to abandon some of his preconceptions about the link between passivity and feminization, and, in doing so, to understand the necessity of certain characteristics he had termed passive. His new need for Claire exemplifies this new understanding. Kepesh tells his therapist, Dr. Klinger, “‘I’ll drive her away. . . .It [his sexual appetite] *will* drive her away finally. Then I’ll have no one. . . .*I won’t have a woman*. I won’t have love and sex ever again!’” (Roth 45). Fearing he will lose Claire, Kepesh willingly takes on a more passive role in their relationship, decreasing the amount of time she sexually pleasures him each with visit. He finally recognizes that he needs Claire for more than just sex.

Interestingly, this is also the first time Kepesh uses the word love in relation to Claire, further indicating his changing view. As Benjamin says,

[i]f we imagine a reappropriating of passivity, we might change our view of femininity, and hence the necessity of an oppositional gender relation as well. What happens when the potentially traumatic experience of passivity is held, enjoyed, and represented because it is experienced as surrender not to the other but to the process itself. . . .the reversal of the active-passive complementary takes us out of the power relation and into the surrender of a process of mutual recognition. (53-54)

Unable to experience release, Kepesh surrenders to the process itself, enjoying the receptive role and the stimulation it provides. Magical realism, through its magical capacities, helps him understand the inherent power relations tied into the active/male, passive/female split. Not only does he realize the falsity of these associations, but also he learns the importance of embracing both the active and passive, which liberates him both emotionally and sexually.

Metamorphosis brings about an understanding of the dangers of women enacting passivity for Carter's Eve. As Evelyn, he simply thinks women should be passive. Recalling a girl he dated, all he can remember is that she had "a certain air of childlike hesitancy. I always liked that particular quality in a woman" (Carter 9). Not only is he attracted to passivity in women, but also this attraction causes both his negative view and his abusive treatment of women. His descriptions of Leilah express this view. At one point, Evelyn wonders "[w]hat did she do all day when she wasn't working? She lay in her narrow, iron bed . . . her mind—as far as I could tell . . . seemed singularly listless, limp, exhausted" (Carter 26). Molding herself into Evelyn's exact expectations of women, Leilah reinforces Evelyn's idea of women's passivity. Thus, he believes it is a

male right to act upon women, and his actions are purely misogynistic.¹⁹⁰ When Evelyn finally leaves the city, he even attributes his attitude and problems to Leilah, saying, “[t]he sickness of the ghetto and the slow delirious sickness of femininity, its passivity, its narcissism, have infected me because of her” (Carter 37). In Evelyn’s mind, women’s passivity becomes a disease, a destructive force having the power to consume men. Evelyn’s words become emblematic of the Judeo-Christian view of women as the source of all sin, beginning with Lillith and Eve. Because women are inherently sinful, it is man’s place to “control” them, making sure sin stays repressed. Therefore, when Leilah’s sin gets out of control, she must be “banished” like the original Lillith, so the sin does not spread to man (Evelyn).

Evelyn’s transformation into Eve gives him a crash course on the dangers of women’s passivity. As Lenora Ledwon notes, “Eve is passive in the Freudian sense of passivity as femininity. Constantly subjected to external agencies, acted upon more often than acting” (36). The passive way she suffers Zero’s beatings and rapes indicates this trait.¹⁹¹ Eve, consequently, becomes Evelyn’s very expectation of women, never once acting against Zero. The impact of Mother’s psychological reprogramming also hits Eve and she realizes that she simply replicates the passivity in the videos.¹⁹² Yet, the more Zero abuses her, the more passive she becomes, still believing passivity is a female trait.¹⁹³ Seeing the danger in enacting passivity, Eve initially cannot escape what she has been modeled upon.

Only after months of Zero’s rapes does Eve finally awaken, discovering that women do not have to be passive victims. Carter uses the rapes as Eve’s catalyst for

several reasons. First, she must come to understand that women do not “ask for” or provoke such violence against their own bodies. Second, she must comprehend the ramifications and effects of Evelyn’s violence against women, as when Zero’s sexual abuse “forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation” (Carter 102). Through her rapes, Eve recognizes the way she, as Evelyn, used power against women and how blindly adopting patriarchal standards only perpetuates violence and abuse against women. This awakening begins Eve’s change. Realizing violence against women is neither women’s fault nor justifiable, she becomes “a savage woman” (Carter 108) when Zero tries to bed her. She also develops sympathy for his other wives, whose “faces of ancient children, who so innocently consented to be less than human, filled me with angry pity” (Carter 108). It is important to note Eve’s changing attitude here, for she realizes that women’s passivity places them in a subhuman role.

Eve’s recognition is further reflected in her view of Tristessa, the ultimate emblem of women’s passivity.¹⁹⁴ As she notes, “Tristessa had no function in this world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one” (Carter 129). Eve comprehends that Tristessa’s devotion to the idea of passive woman eradicates his very existence. However, it is not until her union with Tristessa that Eve has her true awakening.¹⁹⁵ For the first time in her life, Eve actually takes action, rescuing both herself and Tristessa from Cain, as well as destroying Zero and his harem. Her love of Tristessa and her first, positive female sexual experiences also bring about this awakening. After their second, sexual experience, Eve suddenly “saw myself. I

delighted me” (Carter 146). She candidly begins exploring her own body, understanding that women do not have to be passive, submissive beings and that sexuality also can be empowering. Eve, then, represents the need for women to take control of their lives, to stop aligning themselves with the passive, female archetypes constructed to keep women submissive and powerless. And, it is magical realism’s magic that brings this about, for transformed, Eve makes this realization. Once she does so, she is freed from these confines, and her potential and possibilities become limitless.

In a manner similar to Carter’s, Rice also uses magic and archetypes in *Blood of Mugwump*. Drawing on the pre-Hellenistic Medusan myth, a version where her feminine power is celebrated, Rice exemplifies women’s power through sexuality and menstruation. The Medusan motif runs throughout the novel, and Rice frequently describes both Grandma Mugwump and Caddie in such terms.¹⁹⁶ In doing so, he also highlights the Greek inversion of the Medusan myth, an inversion still widely known today. In the Greek version, Medusa became a monstrous woman—a woman whose overt sexuality and power men must control. Susan R. Bowers remarks that “the shield which Perseus uses to reflect Medusa’s face, in order to kill her, is an example of this deflection of female erotic power” (229). Medusa stands as an example; if women cannot be controlled, relegated to their appropriate passive role, they must be eliminated. However, Rice reverts to the pre-Hellenistic Medusa, celebrating her power. According to Bowers, this Medusa

was a powerful goddess at a time when female authority was dominant and the power to be feared was feminine. As the serpent-goddess of the Libyan Amazons, for

example, Medusa represented women's wisdom. A female face surrounded by serpent-hair was an ancient, widely-recognized symbol of the divine, female wisdom. (219)

Rice uses this Medusa as a symbol of women's strength and power, as we will see, for no one dominates Caddie or Grandma Mugwump.

However, Rice both inverts parts of the Hellenistic myth and reverts to the pre-Hellenistic in order to illustrate women's strength. Utilizing the grotesque to do so, he draws from, exaggerates, and reconfigures Medusa. It is not surprising that he uses the grotesque to do so, for as Mikhail Bakhtin says,

[t]he essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. . . . Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. . . . To degrade an object . . . [is] to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other level; it is the fruitful earth and womb. It is always conceiving. (19-20, 21)¹⁹⁷

Rice's inversion of the post-Hellenistic myth, an inversion that illustrates the power of women through the womb, embodies this view of the grotesque's positive, regenerative qualities. According to Bower, Medusa was the ultimate paradox, both beautiful and horrifying. This paradox, Bowers says, extended to the belief that the "blood which flowed from her right side created a life-giving drug . . . whereas blood from her left side produced poisonous snakes" (222). Rewriting this myth, Rice places the snakes not only as the women's hair, but also as tongues and in the women's wombs.¹⁹⁸ For instance, Caddie

pressed her strong cunt over his [Doug's] open mouth and began eating away at his words. Stealing me, making me into a woman, a desire for tongue. Those snakes that were her hair crawled down his throat. . . .Snakes from my sister's monstrous cunt swallowed my mouth. (Rice 10)

Here, the Medusan snakes are inverted; accentuating the grotesque, they become a symbol of female power, for they signify both death and rebirth in their ability both to steal Doug's words (which we will examine more later) and remake him into a woman. Rice's Medusan women also are not conquered. Since, as Bower believes, the myth "can also be analyzed as a deflection of female erotic power. . . .Women empowered with the erotic, which is 'born of chaos,' are dangerous. By pruning the erotic to mere sensation, enemies of women radically diminish female power" (229), in leaving his Medusan women unconquered, Rice celebrates female sexual power.¹⁹⁹

Rice also relies on the pre-Hellenistic myth to displace the notion of women's passivity. Bowers posits that the idea of Medusa's gaze as petrifying probably came from the belief "that her blood was magic because it represented menstrual blood [and] primitive people believed a menstruating woman's look could turn a man to stone" (219). Caddie is a prime example of the way Rice demonstrates the power of menstrual blood. Caddie, who "made me [Doug] into stone, watching her turn away from my gaze" (Rice 130), is also described as "bleeding now but has never died. Will never die, not in a million years" (Rice 49).²⁰⁰ Doug upholds the idea that menstrual blood is a powerful, feminine force—it is not something horrifying, but rather magical. Rice illustrates—again utilizing the grotesque—that the blood is the ultimate source of birth and rebirth in

the passage wherein Caddie tells Doug “[y]ou will not die from bleeding. I am not among the dead. . . . You will bleed into life, not into death” (Rice 44). Through bleeding, women become infinite and unending; they become the Medusa of pre-Hellenistic myth, forwarding women’s strength and power. As Rice says of the novel, he is trying to write the body, not as a woman, but as a man trying to understand the body itself outside of gender preconceptions.²⁰¹ Rice, familiar with many feminist writers, understands what Hélène Cixous says when she writes, “I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man. . . . it’s up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at” (162).²⁰² He knows that he cannot truly write women, for he does not understand all their experiences as such. Consequently, he says, “[t]here are no real women in *Mugwump*” (qtd. in Violet par. 9). Writing as a man, however, he can investigate and tear down the idealized standards of gender for both sexes, and Medusa becomes the perfect vehicle for this. Luce Irigaray comments that “woman’s desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks” (25). Medusa, then, represents a purer, nonpatriarchal gender, capable of disintegrating female gender stereotypes.

Each novel’s magical realism also highlights the power issues revolving around speech and language. As many feminist scholars have noted, patriarchal language has long been used to silence and exclude women’s voices.²⁰³ Susan Gal expands on this view of patriarchal language, explaining that

women, due to their structural positions, have models of reality that differ from the male-dominated societal model. The form of women’s models is often nonverbal,

inarticulate, or veiled, while the discourse of men is more verbal and explicit, and thereby more congruent with the usual discourse of Western social science. Being unable to express their structurally generated views in the dominant and masculine discourse, women are neither understood nor heeded, and become inarticulate, "muted," or even silent. (419)

Patriarchal language, leaving women speechless and ignored, also renders women powerless. Discerning this dilemma, Gal says, "those who are denied speech cannot make their experience known and thus cannot influence the course of their lives or of history" (407). Roth uses both irony and Kepesh's own inversion to delve into this issue. First, Roth's irony belittles the importance of patriarchal speech, for Kepesh discovers his nipple actually was formed from his penis. Since he speaks through his nipple, Kepesh is, in effect, speaking from his "other" head, which devalues patriarchal speech and language. Second, through Kepesh's diminished capacity for speech, he experiences firsthand the powerlessness of being unheard and ignored. Time after time, Kepesh gives impassioned speeches to no avail.²⁰⁴ Speaking, which requires "that I virtually give a recitation . . . whenever I wanted to make my every word understood." (Roth 88), leads to growing feelings of powerlessness and urgency.²⁰⁵ His desperation culminates in his emphatic plea to Dr. Klinger, a plea punctuated with "[l]isten to me . . . Do you hear me, Doctor? Do you understand my words?. . . Do you hear me? Do you understand me?" (Roth 83-84). In this way, Kepesh comes to understand the damaging effects of having one's voice silenced.

The patriarchal silencing of women relegates them to an animal-like status in *The Passion of New Eve*. This is first noticeable in Evelyn's understanding (or rather lack

thereof) of Leilah's speech. Evelyn describes it as containing "more expostulations than sentences for she rarely had the patience or the energy to put together subject, verb, object and extension in an ordered and logical fashion, so sometimes she sounded more like a demented bird than a woman" (Carter 19).²⁰⁶ He believes that women's language is foreign, inaccessible to men, and Leilah is both unheard and silenced, as she does not conform to patriarchal language standards. Evelyn also uses this logic to equate her with the animalistic, thereby justifying her subjugation. It is only fitting, then, that Eve encounters the same silencing. As Zero's wife, she is prohibited from speaking English, and all his wives, "hooted, roared, mewed, squeaked, and clucked like a flying menagerie, in a chorus of triumph that did not contain one human word or sound" (Carter 85). Believing them no better than animals, Zero treats them as such, beating them if they are caught communicating in English. He even strips away communication among each other, and "our first words every morning were spoken in a language we ourselves could not understand" (Carter 97). Zero reserves the sounds of dogs and wolves for his own communication to the women, making himself the alpha-dog in his self-created animal kingdom and dominating the women through his own patriarchal language.²⁰⁷ Carter employs these languages satirically, for they become exaggerated substitutes that exemplify patriarchal language's power to silence women. Cixous says that when a woman speaks, "her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (165). In forcing the women to speak a language he cannot understand and in denying the women access to his own masculine language, Zero exemplifies both the male desire and need to silence women.

Rice, conversely, reclaims speech for women, making it a source of power over men. He does so using a complicated system of metaphors and Biblical allusion. First, Rice attributes “cunt” to the making of words and language. This is most apparent when Doug references, “[t]he words between your [Caddie’s and Grandma Mugwump’s] thighs” (Rice 41).²⁰⁸ Rice also joins the idea of the womb and words to the Biblical idea of the word made flesh.²⁰⁹ We see this reference when Doug says that it is Caddie’s womb that “swallows” his mouth, “drowning the word that in the beginning was flesh” (Rice 10). Here, Rice plays with several ideas. First, there is the womb’s power to take back language. Second, there is the idea that the womb/female can remake language, for it takes back the word, and consequently, all associations, leaving only the original flesh—again, a rebirth as well as a reformulation of the idea of body. Rice, in this respect, reflects Irigaray’s belief that “[o]ne would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing *an ‘other meaning’ always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them*” (29). It is this rigidity in language, particularly of the body, that Rice wants to abandon, saying “[e]veryone today wants to write ‘about’ the body. That’s silly. I think it is more important to write the body. . . .The pain of being inscribed and then coming to know your actions through language on the body” (qtd. in Violet par. 8). The key here is Rice’s comment about language *on*, not *of* the body.²¹⁰ This idea of stripping away the language of the body is reinforced when Doug says “in the beginning there were no words” (Rice 40). Additionally, Rice’s focus on the womb’s power “exposes” and denies the belief, as Irigaray says, of woman’s “sexual organ” representing “*the horror of*

nothing to see” (26). Irigaray continues, observing, “[i]t is already evident in Greek statuary that this nothing-to-see has to be excluded, rejected, from such a scene of representation. Woman’s genitals are simply absent, masked, sewn back up inside their ‘crack’” (26). Instead, the womb becomes “something,” a powerful source for reexamining traditional ideas of women’s bodies, and the womb and language combined help women reclaim, or rather rebirth the idea of the body.

The Blood of Mugwump also reflects the absence found in patriarchal speech, an absence that is unable to conceive gender of the body outside of traditional “norms.” Often entrapping men, Doug illustrates this absence when he transforms back into a man and “[t]hose old words, old stories, began gurgling up into my mouth. . . . Alien words and I had no way to say them aloud. I kept wanting to say. I needed to let words happen. But the words were not there. I moved my mouth against the silence. More silence” (Rice 30).²¹¹ Doug loses the power of speech when he is a man; he becomes sterile and stagnant with the words dying inside his mouth. Furthermore, Doug associates this as a general plight of men, for he finds that “[m]en’s tongues. . . .slop around here and there without any serious direction or intention. As if they are lost” (Rice 61). Patriarchal language is lost, for it frequently does not know how to encapsulate the body or gender, other than in masculine definitions. And, these definitions only address duality. It is Doug’s recognition of gender’s flexibility that frees him, for, as he claims, “Doug Rice has a cunt that does not bleed but knows speech” (Rice 129). Female speech carries power, therefore, through its ability to reconceive the “flesh” and gender in ways that patriarchal language cannot.

Magical realism, in this context, underscores the male-female power issues of each novel's time period as well as how power is enacted. The style also highlights women's "passive" position as well as the ensuing subjugation and silencing passivity produces. For Kepesh, who struggles with the changing women's roles, it is far harder to adjust to what he views as his own feminization and changed position. Consequently, his reconceptualization of the power tied to the active/passive split and speech/language is far more subtle, and Roth often satirizes Kepesh's views, demonstrating just how dated they are. The position his transformation places him in forces Kepesh to renegotiate his view of passivity and patriarchal language. Eve's transformation exposes her to the very ways she oppressed women as a man. Eve's passivity and silencing also leads to her understanding of the danger in women enacting femininity based on masculine codes. Rice inverts the conception of female passivity. Using speech and language, he reclaims the concept of the body from stagnant, patriarchal language and rebirths it for women.

Gender Identity

What is termed gender identity is irrevocably linked to both power and performance; consequently, the notion of gender identity as fixed is a fallacy. As Butler terms it, gender identity is a "regulatory fiction" that "consolidate[s] and naturalize[s] the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression" (44). It is such a fiction because gender identity, as it's traditionally conceived, requires a compulsory heterosexuality, i.e. a unity among people's sex, desire, and gender.²¹² For gender

identity to be real, sex, gender, and desire must always be linked: man (sex) = attraction to women (desire) = male/masculinity (gender) and vice versa. Since this link does not always occur, gender identity becomes a regulatory fiction. Instead, society creates a binary gender system that relegates people into either the male or female gender category. This regulation, Butler remarks, “suppresses the subversive multiplicity of sexuality that disrupts the heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies” (26).²¹³ In other words, hegemonic discourse creates a compulsory heterosexuality that reinforces the binary gender system. An “intelligible” gender, then, is one that fits the binary framework.²¹⁴ The problem, of course, is that this gender system disregards anyone who does not align with traditional, heterosexual norms.

However, there is no fixed gender identity, something which the magical realism in each novel underscores. Even the claim to be either a man or a woman, as Butler notes, “tends to subordinate the notion of gender under that of identity and lead to the conclusion that a person is a gender and is one in virtue of his or her sex, psychic sense of self, and various expressions of that psychic self, the most salient being that of sexual desire” (29). Gender identity, hence, is revealed to be nothing more than a social construction, a performance of societal ideals of gender.²¹⁵ Butler herself points to the way the enactment of gender varies and changes over time and across cultures:

gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self. . . . Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions . . . the construction

‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (176, 178)

Given the intertwining of power and performance, we will see how each author’s magical realism delves into his or her central characters’ concept of their own gender identity and how their final definition reflects their time period.

In *The Breast*, magical realism and satire reveal the strength and power of the binary gender system. The way Kepesh strives to maintain his male, gender identity depicts this strength. First, he tries to act, unsuccessfully, as if his metamorphosis elicited no changes in his identity:

[y]ou see, it is not a matter of doing what is right or seemly; I am not concerned, I can assure you, with the etiquette of being a breast. It is rather doing what I would do if I could continue to be me. And I would, for if not me, who? What? Either I continue to be myself, or I will go mad. (Roth 27-28)²¹⁶

It is obvious that Kepesh’s sense of self is enmeshed in his view of his gender identity as male, for he cannot help but reinforce this “fact.” We see this when he tells Dr. Klinger, “[y]ou want me to be *ordinary*—you expect me to be *ordinary* in this condition! I’m supposed to be a sensible man—when I am like this!” (Roth 51). There are two key, yet oppositional components that appear in his exclamations. The first is that he admits he has changed. The second is his refusal to address what this change means for his notion of gender identity. Formerly a man, a “recognizable” gender, he is now something different in the female form of a breast. Yet, Kepesh continues to insist on his status as a

man, despite understanding the implications of being a breast.²¹⁷ Ironically he upholds the binary gender division, even though he no longer inhabits an intelligible gender.

Roth also carries his parody over to the way Kepesh maintains compulsory heterosexuality. Realizing the feminine implications of his form, Kepesh repeatedly refers to his sexual desires as “grotesque.” The fact that he associates a woman [Claire or Miss Clark] performing a sexual act on his nipple as grotesque shows he ascribes to compulsory heterosexuality. This belief is further indicated in his thoughts about his male nurse, Mr. Brooks, where he admits he cannot, “sweep aside the homosexual taboo and imagine my nipple, for instance, in the mouth or anus of Mr. Brooks . . . though I realize that the conjunction of male mouth and female nipple can hardly be described as a homosexual act” (Roth 50).²¹⁸ The irony is in Kepesh’s recognition of what would be considered a “normal” sexual act and his inability to reconceptualize his “male” gender identity.²¹⁹ Roth’s humor here is in the fact that Kepesh upholds compulsory heterosexuality, yet cannot, as a breast, fit its definitions.

Despite Kepesh’s insistency on a male gender identity, Roth highlights his performance. As a breast, he can no longer simply “be” a man, but must convince everyone he still is, including himself. This performance is accentuated when Kepesh says,

[o]ne might think that one consequence of such a transformation would be that the victim could cease for the time being to bother himself with matters of propriety and decorum and personal pride. But as they are intimately connected to my idea of sanity and to my self-esteem, I am actually ‘bothered’ as I wasn’t in my former life. (Roth 26)

Rather than integrating his old identity with his new, Kepesh tries harder to perform his old identity. When this fails, he considers every alternative that leads him away from the “feminine.”²²⁰ It is at this point that the performance’s destructiveness is apparent.

Kepesh relates that his continual denial requires such an effort “that by nightfall I felt it would take no more than a puff from a child’s lips to snuff out the wavering flame of memory and intelligence and hope that still claimed to be David Alan Kepesh” (Roth 84). His inability to disentangle gender identity from overall identity, as well as his unwillingness to reassess his view of gender identity, leads to manic levels of performativity, becoming so desperate and draining that he almost completely loses himself.

Eve’s metamorphosis allows her to recognize the flexibility of gender identity. Understanding how gender identity is enacted when Zero dresses Eve as Tristessa’s groom and stands her before a mirror, Eve comments that “this masquerade was more than skin deep. Under the mask of maleness I wore another mask of femaleness” (Carter 132). Eve now recognizes the duality of gender, referring to herself and Tristessa as “Tiresias,” and, later, claiming she is “Eve and Adam both” (Carter 146, 165).²²¹ Eve understands that there is neither a separation of genders, nor a true gender identity, but rather, both men and women contain aspects attributed to both genders.²²² She comments that

[m]asculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another. I am sure of that—the quality and its negation are locked in necessity. But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female . . . I do not know. (Carter 149-50).

Eve, here, echoes the view that genders, whether there are two or many, are inseparably intertwined. That Eve also does not view gender as binary is evidenced through the fact that she is unsure whether gender even involves the male or female. Thus, Eve upholds what Butler posits about gender: that in separating sex and gender from each other, “gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (10). In establishing gender’s duality, Eve not only discredits the binary gender division, but also readily accepts the idea of all humans containing varied traits, traits that she in no way sees tied to a specific gender.

Tristessa, though, points to how performativity, within patriarchal contexts, reinforces the idea of binary gender. Even after consummating his relationship with Eve, he cannot help but refer and revert to his female performance. He continually tells stories from the female Tristessa’s perspective, so that Eve never really knows who he is, only that “his fictive autobiography might have had some trace element of fact in it, for all I know” (Carter 152). When the Children’s Crusade captures them, Tristessa again quickly reverts to his female performance. Though the children have cut his hair, shaved his head, and washed all the make-up off his face, “[b]efore my eyes . . . he changed into his female aspect. He reverted entirely to the sinuous principle of his notion of femininity” (Carter 156). Kissing the leader on the lips, Tristessa immediately is shot and killed, emphasizing, again, how upholding such performances and rigid ideas only leads to devastation. Tristessa’s solidified view of gender identity and the performance he associates with each gender makes him “too much of a woman, already, for the good of

the sex,” as well as gives him an “awful ineradicable quality of . . . maleness” (Carter 173). Consequently, Tristessa’s literal death signifies the necessary death of binary gender identity.

Magical realism and metaphors strip away at binary gender’s façade in *The Blood of Mugwump*. The repeated references to Adam and Eve reinforce this stripping away. Rice posits the idea that the separation of sexes was an abnormal act, first occurring with Adam and Eve, for, as Doug says, God “made me a man out of the same dirt of Grandma Mugwump rising out of the river running into me, a woman fleeing from the rib of Eve and Adam thrown out of their bodies from Paradise into my body” (Rice 40). The fact that Doug is thrown out of his body— and also out of Paradise—and into the body of a man signifies the violent way genders are binarily separated.²²³ Further corroborating this violent separation, he refers to God’s act of pulling the rib out of Adam as a “bloody mess” (Rice 97). In this regard, Adam and Eve’s separation is not celebrated, but rather is presented as the messy creation of gender division. Additionally, after Lilith is removed from the Garden of Eden, Adam finds not Eve, but another Adam curled at his feet. In the silence, Adam names both himself and Eve, thereby creating gender. Eve becomes “Adam’s fault. Naming the silence” (Rice 97). Adam and Eve, then, become the ultimate symbol of binary gender, for not only does God err in separating the two, but so does Adam in naming Eve. The description of this act also redefines the idea of the “original sin,” for it becomes man’s and God’s, rather than woman’s. Finally, Rice’s metaphorical use of ribs breaking and limbs separating indicates the way gender is still divided today.

Considering the sense of wholeness it creates, Doug's ability to morph between genders negates the idea of a fixed gender identity. For this reason, Doug never limits himself to just one gender, at one point saying, "[t]here I was, me a girl" (Rice 10), and at another he calls himself "some sort of man" (Rice 18).²²⁴ Doug realizes, however, that it is compulsory heterosexuality and binary gender that confine people, forcing them to adapt to established norms. Despite knowing he is not a specific gender, knowing there is no real gender identity, Doug is always "driven by what I cannot be" (Rice 126). And, as shown earlier, what he cannot be is regulated by expectations of gender performance, expectations that insist he conform to an either/or gender category. Rice's own words exemplify this dilemma:

[t]he sex change does not cure so much as it masks the disturbance in the field of the body. All these images that our culture gives us of cross dressing and transgenders are all safe. They have been sanctified and purified by the powers that be. . . .even the radical images coming to the public from other sites of desires are safe because it allows people in America to create a distance between "them" and "us". . . .The bigger threat is the man, like myself, with a family and so on, who takes his own instability seriously. I could be, in fact, I am, the boy/girl next door. Married with children. That may worry some people. (qtd. in Violet par. 18)

As the boy/girl next door, Rice's character Doug refuses to perform gender and refuses to fall into the binary gender trap. Because of this, he is free to express gender as he perceives it—which is the integration of both masculine and feminine gender qualities—and open to societal persecution.

Magical realism, in the end, puts forth differing notions of gender in each work. While Kepesh is able to understand gender's performativity and alter his perceptions of

male/female power relations, he cannot give up his association of himself with a male gender identity. Roth satirizes this inability throughout, even up to the conclusion where Kepesh believes the last lines of Rilke's poem, "[y]ou *must*/change your life," "is not necessarily as elevated a sentiment as we all might once have liked to believe" (Roth 112). It is Kepesh's very inability to change that leaves him in a stagnant position, killing time just as his father did. Eve, on the other hand, comes to understand that gender performance and identity, when patriarchally defined, create the very archetypes that oppress women. Therefore, when she crawls through the womb-like caves, searching for Mother at the end of the novel, she does not find her. What she discovers instead is actually a rebirth, for, emerging from the cave, Eve emits "a single, frail, inconsolable cry like that of a new-born child" (Carter 186). Here, the transformation is complete, and the now pregnant Eve is fully reborn as a new woman/mother. Her rebirth allows her to start over, recuperating mythical female roles such as mother, virgin, and whore. The last image of her is adrift in a boat, surrounded by water. Eve's final comment, "[o]cean, ocean, mother of mysteries, bear me to the place of birth" (Carter 191), illustrates that she is a blank canvas, able to redefine archetypal roles to her own advantage. Finally, as seen with Rice, gender is a flexible, not a congealed, identity. Doug's turmoil comes not from expressing himself in dual-gendered terms, not from transforming back and forth between a man and a woman, but from societal regulations of gender. Doug demonstrates that the societal emphasis placed on properly performing gender creates chaos and sorrow for those who cannot conform. Furthermore, restricting gender to an either/or proposition makes those who cannot fit within the binary outcasts. In this sense, we also see a

revision of Butler's conception of gender performance. For Butler, gender is always a performance, a sort of "trap" we fall into and never escape. However, as seen in each character, to varying extents, once there is a recognition of gender's performance, there is a re-evaluation of what goes into that performance. This consciousness, in many respects, brings about a more natural gender—as characters stop trying to live up to certain societal expectations, they begin acting more naturally, abandoning ingrained performances and acting on their own instincts. Additionally, it is magical realism, through its magic, that functions as a cultural agent, opening each character's eyes to gender mythology. While each character's response, as well as the issues each author highlights, is curtailed to the specific time of composition, all benefit and change because of their own magical transformations.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUPERNATURAL AND CULTURAL AGENCY

In Chapter Two, we saw how magical realism, by means of the cultural agency the magical metamorphoses brought about, influences ideas of gender identity. Each character's female/feminine metamorphosis forces them to address gender as both a performance and a social construction rather than as a biological given. Tearing apart ideas of gender as a binary system (either you are male/masculine or female/feminine), characters renegotiate gender as something that is fluid and changing rather than static and fixed. Further examining the magical's cultural agency, this chapter will illustrate how ghosts allow characters to reevaluate ideas of self and identity as well as overcome communal rejection. The narrative technique allows the authors to raise questions about both the dominant, white culture and the marginalized communal culture and how both cultures inform identity. As several critics have pointed out, ghosts allow us to "successfully broaden and deepen our world and perhaps open ourselves to a greater reality" (Walker 6). Lois Parkinson Zamora, for example, asserts that ghosts often serve as "guides," and they are, along with much magical realism, "particularly well-suited to enlarging and enriching western ontological understanding," for their "counterrealistic conventions" reject "the binarisms, rationalisms, and reductive materialisms of Western ontological understanding" (119).²²⁵ As such guides, the specters in magical realist works such as Alice Hoffman's *The River King* (2000), Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer*

(1994), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) aide the characters in exploring and understanding the world around them. Characters such as Hoffman's Carlin Leander, Power's Charlene Thunder, and Morrison's Denver are each isolated from their cultural community. Effectively, they are each on the margins of the margins.²²⁶ On one hand, none of the girls are members of the dominant, white culture. On the other, their isolation also places them outside their own marginalized community. Through a kind of double alienation, the girls develop negative and self-deprecating identities, and the appearance of specters in each work helps each girl to wrestle with both her history and inheritance, enabling her process of healing and self-discovery. Moreover, only when each character accepts the ghostly guidance is she empowered, positively renegotiating her identity. This also brings about an understanding of the community from which they were isolated. In gaining this understanding, they are able to adapt to the community while simultaneously keeping their sense of individuality.

As Jacques Derrida notes in his influential work, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, the spectral is important because it provides a path for transforming and rethinking ideological stances. It does this by calling up what already has occurred; hence, it is always repeating (a "revenant"), always coming and going, but never completely gone.²²⁷ This revenant becomes "hauntology," for, as Derrida says, one cannot truly learn to live without the specter and its lessons. In fact, Derrida posits that learning to live

can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death *alone*. What happens between two, and between all the "two's" one likes, such as between life and

death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost. . . .The time of ‘learning to live,’ a time without tutelary present, would amount to this, to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to live *with* ghosts. . . .And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generation. (xviii-xix)

As Derrida says, we cannot live without ghosts because they provide the key for understanding and remembering what has happened in the past—our memory and inheritance. Without understanding these things, we are not truly living, but simply stuck in a stagnant “now.” We see this stasis in *The River King*, *The Grass Dancer*, and *Beloved*. Each character is fixated on her recent past, on things that cannot be changed. Consequently, they are trapped in an endless cycle of self-degradation and isolation from their societies. Hence, the ghosts push these past occurrences to the forefront and provide Carlin, Charlene, and Denver a path for renegotiating both inheritance as well as ideological perspectives. This renegotiation, in turn, allows each character to finally move out of their paralysis, empowering them.

Derrida also speaks of “justice” which is not yet present. According to Derrida, we cannot even begin to imagine a justice or equality for all people without speaking “*of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it*” (xix). Doing so allows us to critique the past, righting injustices in the present. As Derrida notes,

Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?” (xix)

Consequently, present-day hegemony is what recalls the specter. As Derrida says, “Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (37). However, the girls must deal with two hegemonic powers: that of the dominant and of the communal. As in Derrida’s model, each girl must understand her past and learn from the ghosts in order to combat the oppression and overcome the rejection. Concordantly, the specters also are the compulsory result of each girl’s oppression and rejection (which we will delve into later). Viewing Carlin, Charlene, and Denver and their cultural communities as inferior, the dominant hegemony oppresses them. However, the girls’ communities also belittle and exclude the girls for choices their parental figures made or simply for not conforming to their standards. Therefore, the ghosts step in to alleviate this alienation, providing the key for Carlin, Charlene, and Denver’s growth and escape from their isolated circumstances. Thus, as Derrida asserts, it is through the spectral that each character renegotiates her place and role in society.

Traditionally, ghosts in U.S. magical realism have been analyzed for their role in ethnic-American texts. Three dominant theories for their appearance are often proposed, theories that are directly linked to Derrida’s correlation of the specter and hegemony. The first posits the idea that apparitions are a way for marginalized peoples to come to terms with violent and/or repressive histories, which, in turn, allows them to move forward. As Arthur Redding writes,

it is by excavating the suppressed possibilities of a past that has been erased, by conversing with those ancestral ghosts that lay claim on us, that we can begin, again,

to participate in the process of ethnic self-determination. The past, which has been either denied or utilized as a means of imprisoning us, can begin to function as a haunted place, a place through which we begin to imagine a future. (174-75)²²⁸

Thus, ghosts not only aid ethnic communities in recapturing the past (such as past memories and traditions), but also redefine ethnic identity in the present and for the future; specters are the carriers of communal/collective memory and history.²²⁹ As Kathleen Brogan notes, “[t]hrough the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised” (6).²³⁰ Since specters in ethnic texts come to represent a shared history, they are often read communally, rather than individually. Finally, given the importance of community/ethnic identity, many scholars also believe apparitions aide in the reintegration of those isolated in individuality. According to Zamora, ghosts frequently “act as correctives to the insularities of individuality, as links to lost families and communities,” as well as, “dissent . . . from modernity’s . . . psychological assumptions about autonomous consciousness and self-constituted identity and propose instead a model of the self that is collective” (118). The spectral represents ethnic history and oppression; therefore, it commonly illustrates the importance of a collective ethnic identity, while also enabling ethnic groups to reclaim history and memory and reshape ethnic identity for the future.

Given the different time periods and ethnicities, the overarching purpose of each ghost is not the same for Hoffman, Morrison, and Power. While Carlin, Charlene, and Denver come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, each girl has comparable

experiences of isolation and loneliness. However, race and ethnicity do play different role in *The Grass Dancer* and *Beloved*. Indeed, much has been written about the role of race, history, and beliefs/traditions of the respective peoples. In *The Grass Dancer*, which focuses on the Sioux/Dakota people, the ghosts serve as a reminder of Native American tradition and its incompatibility with “the rational, technological, and spiritual groundwork of the west” (Wright 39).²³¹ *Beloved*, in turn, uses specters to explore the history of pain and violence African Americans inherited from slavery and how African Americans can come to terms with this history.²³² Regarding apparitions in ethnic works, Redding sees them as shedding light on a past and history that has been obliterated and oppressive, allowing healing to take place.²³³ Many scholars believe that the magical realism in ethnic works springs from belief systems, stories, and even histories not found within white culture.²³⁴ To this effect, ghosts obviously provide specific statements about race, culture, history, and tradition in multiethnic American writing; hence ghosts in the three works serve multiple and varied purposes, often based on the particular ethnic group’s history and culture.

Yet, this emphasis on ethnicity almost always excludes white ethnicity from its discussion of specters in magical realist works. While Zamora does recognize the role of ghosts in white texts, noting the culturally-specific role they play in both Flannery O’Connor and William Faulkner’s fiction, she does not go into any great depth about their appearance in white works. Similarly, despite the fact Brogan says “[g]hosts are not the exclusive province of any single ethnic group” (29), she does not focus on any works from white authors.²³⁵ Thus, white authors such as Hoffman are frequently eliminated

from discussions of the topic. This commonly occurs because of the long-standing idea of white privilege, where preference and special treatment are given to this group based on their “superior” race.²³⁶ While white privilege still exists, many scholars are beginning to take note of the variances in this privilege based on socioeconomic status. As Monica McDermott and Frank L. Samson write, “[p]oor . . . gay . . . or otherwise marginalized whites are likely to have a different experiences of their privileged racial identity than are others able to see the direct payoff of white skin privilege” (249). Since many whites have come to view whiteness as a benefit only for upper classes, new studies have begun to focus on white racial identity.²³⁷ According to McDermott and Samson, “[g]iven the close association between whiteness and socioeconomic privilege, poor and working class whites are especially likely to be aware of their whiteness as well as to have a complex understanding of what it means to be white in the United States today” (249-50). Hoffman’s Carlin Leander falls into this class. Coming from a poor, single-mother home, she is starkly aware of the differences between herself and the privileged, upper class white students at the Haddan School. In fact, as we will see, it is Carlin’s view of her own white racial identity that informs her self-deprecation. Therefore, Brogan is correct when she says

[i]f the historical and cultural differences that emerge in these many rich and complex haunted tales are ignored, the parallel I would draw devolves into meaningless or, worse, would contribute rhetorically to the very ghosting or erasure of ethnic otherness that these haunted texts explore and combat. (16)

Thus, the need each girl has for ghostly guidance stems from her own particular ethnic dilemmas. Given that Carlin, Charlene, and Denver are all on the margins of the margins, I will look specifically at each hegemony and at the guiding role apparitions play in *The River King*, *The Grass Dancer*, and *Beloved*.²³⁸ While each girl's experiences differ based on ethnicity, what joins the works is the fact that the specters provide the characters a path for healing and self-discovery.²³⁹

Navigating Oppression and Rejection

As noted earlier, Derrida posits that hegemony and specters are linked: as long as a hegemony oppresses the underclass, the specters of the past will come back. However, it is both oppression and rejection that produce the ghosts in the three works. For Derrida, the dominant group, in these instances, the white, upper class, uses its power to hold back or oppress those on the margins, viewing those marginalized as inferior, hence unworthy of equal participation within the hegemony. This oppression occurs through a variety of means, with exploitation, marginalization, rendering a group powerless, colonial imperialism and violence being the most common forms.²⁴⁰ Oppression also eliminates an individual's "resilient autonomy," according to T. L. Zutlevics, which is the ability to exert unlimited and interminable control over one's future.²⁴¹ As we will see, these oppressive measures are employed, in various combinations, in *The River King*, *The Grass Dancer*, and *Beloved*. The fact that each girl is actually on the margins of the margins also goes beyond Derrida's model, for he only looks at the correlation between

the revenant's return and the dominant group's oppression. Instead, what we see in each novel is the correlation between oppression, communal rejection and spectral intervention. Unlike the dominant group's oppression, which is based on views of the marginalized as inferior, the marginalized community instead rejects characters (and members of their families) who do not fit their cultural ideals and expectations and who are seen as trying to enter the dominant group's world. In this way, the dominant group's oppression directly influences the communal rejection. In turn, this dual marginalization calls forth the ghosts.

That the dual marginalization calls the ghosts first becomes apparent through Derrida's concept of "time out of joint"²⁴² Drawing from *Hamlet*, Derrida says time becomes of joint when "something in the present is not going well, it is not going as it *ought to go*" (23), which triggers the ghost's return. For Derrida, what leads to this disruption of time is injustice—injustice that goes unrectified in the here and now.²⁴³ As we will see, the injustice that occurs in each text stems from oppression *and* rejection. Both the dominant and communal groups perpetrate injustice, basing their actions on a set of "behavioral rules" that the oppression "mandates." These behavioral rules also qualify both groups' rejection as well as the ensuing injustice, for both occur when *either* hegemony perceives that a character is overstepping his/her bounds. As noted earlier, this typically occurs when a community believes a character is trying to "elevate" his/her position above that of the cultural group of which he/she is a member and/or imitate the behaviors of the dominant group.

This combination of oppression, rejection, and injustice leads to the specter's emergence. What then occurs, as Derrida illustrates through Hamlet, is paralysis: Hamlet is unable to properly analyze his past, which, in turn, makes him unable to act in the present or look to the future. Thus, it is the ghost's return that makes time out of joint, which immobilizes Carlin, Charlene, and Denver; none of the girls are able to understand or critique the past, present, or future. Therefore, each ghost represents a past that Carlin, Charlene, and Denver have avoided. Given their inability to address and/or comprehend the past, we also see how each girl reaches her breaking point. It is only then that the girls become receptive to the revenant's aid, and the ghosts enable the girls. In fact, the comfort each finds in the specter's presence allows them to begin a healing process. Thus, the ghosts act as cultural agents, helping the girls navigate oppression and rejection as well as their inheritance.

First, we will explore the oppression occurring at the hands of the dominant culture in each work. In *The River King*, the dichotomy between white classes and the ensuing oppression based on socioeconomic factors is established at the beginning. The wealthy Haddan students and their privileges are sharply contrasted to the poorer native Hamilton people and the hardships they endure. Initially, local residents must home school their children: there is no public school, nor do they earn enough money to send their children to the expensive Haddan school. Furthermore, the exploitation of the locals propels the school's construction. As Hoffman writes of the library, it was "fashioned out of river rock, gray slabs flecked with mica that had been hauled from the banks by local boys hired for a dollar a day, laborers whose hands bled from their efforts and who

cursed the Haddan School forever after” (8). Similarly, Gus Pierce, when alive, also is far removed from the beauty and wealth of the other students attending the private Haddan School. Like Carlin, Gus comes from a poor family. His father, a high school biology teacher, works as a magician at children’s parties to earn extra money. His appearance also reflects this poverty, as he is described as a “loser” who “wore a long, black coat that hung like a sackcloth on his spindly frame. . . .An unlighted cigarette dangled from his wide mouth. Even with the fresh air streaming in through the window there was no way to disguise the fact he stank” (Hoffman 26-27). Given his status and appearance, the Haddan students immediately oppress him. They take every chance they get to ridicule and harass Gus, going as far as to urinate on his clothing and bedding. Consequently, Gus comes to view “his own life as a prison sentence and . . . [experience] his existence as a condemned man might have” (Hoffman 28).²⁴⁴ Powerless, Gus cannot escape the condemnation his classmates heap on him. Even his flight to the infirmary does nothing to alleviate his situation.

Carlin is all too familiar with oppression from the privileged upper class. She knows she doesn’t “fit in” with the Haddan students who flaunt their wealth. In fact, the girls in Carlin’s dorm, St. Anne’s, “had filled their closets with boots and wool jackets and dresses so expensive that a single one cost more than Carlin had spent on her yearly wardrobe, most of it bought at secondhand stores and at the Sunshine Flea Market” (Hoffman 38). Consequently, Carlin tries to protect herself from oppression. She disguises her poverty, inventing an elaborate story that explains her lack of possessions, for she can “well imagine what they might do if they ever got hold of the true details of

her life before Haddan” (Hoffman 43). Fearing discovery, Carlin only ends up distancing herself from the other girls. She prefers the cemetery and the company of the dead because “those who’d passed on did not gossip and judge, nor did they wish to exclude anyone from their ranks” (Hoffman 40-41). It is only with the marginalized Gus that Carlin finds a friend and “ally,” but her friendship with Gus further distances her from the rest of the Haddan students.

Red Dress understands that the dominant, white culture in *The Grass Dancer* wants to eradicate her people’s entire culture. Initially, her people resist, trading only with other tribes and avoiding white supplies and products. When a priest, Father La Frambois, comes to convert Red Dress’s Dakota people, he learns that she speaks English and asks her to translate his sermons. However, she intentionally mistranslates. She does not tell him she does so, believing “it would be rude to tell the priest his teachings were just another import for us to resist” (Power 246). While she wants to protect her people, Father La Frambois sees conversion as the only way of saving her people. When he discovers the truth, Red Dress suddenly realizes “[i]n Father La Frambois’s [and by extension the dominant hegemony’s] view of the world, we were already a degraded people, whom he intended to elevate, single-handedly, into the radiant realm of civilization” (Power 246). It is at this point that she also understands why she does not tell the Father her people’s stories. As she says, “I had been protecting myself, refusing to speak aloud the legends and ideas I thought would sound absurd in bare English. I nurtured secrecy to avoid derision” (Power 247). In the end, Red Dress dies trying to protect her people from the white colonization and marginalization.

After death, her spirit continues to watch over her people, but all she sees is “too many soldiers and too many graves. Too many children packed into trains and sent to the other side of the country. . . .I saw the language shrivel, and though I held out my hands to catch the words, so many of them slipped away” (Power 281-82). This oppression becomes part of the modern day Dakota’s heritage. Furthermore, the Dakota still struggle to protect their original culture from the whites. This struggle is reflected in the stories the Dakota students tell their white teacher. When prompted to share and celebrate their heritage, the students either make up or tell inconsequential stories. One student tells what he views as a “baby story,” knowing “his friends would understand how inappropriate it would be for him to speak publicly of his grandfather’s ceremonies or reveal his heart for everyone to see” (Power 61). After centuries of oppression and marginalization, the Dakota protect their culture and heritage at all costs.

Slavery, encompassing all aspects of oppression, is the black community’s heritage in *Beloved*. The effects of this oppression are largely revealed through Sethe, Denver’s mother. We learn how all of her mother’s children were sold away from her. We also see the violence and cruelty Sethe and other slaves undergo at the hands of their owner and his family. The owner, called Schoolteacher, believes the African slaves are nothing more than animals. He teaches this to his nephews, having them examine Sethe and ““put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right”” (Morrison 193). He forces the men to wear bridles with bits in their mouths, and his nephews feed off Sethe’s breast milk. Later they beat her so badly she is left with a scarred “tree” on her back. Even after she escapes her cruel owner and flees to safety in the North with her

four children, Sethe cannot escape the memories of the abuse she suffered at white hands, and the scar on her back remains a painful reminder the rest of her life. Her flight also costs Sethe her husband, who never makes it to the house of his mother, Baby Suggs, where Sethe takes up residence. Settling into a calm and happy life with Baby Suggs, Sethe experiences freedom for the first time, vowing that her children will never experience slavery. However, her newfound peace is soon disrupted when she learns Schoolteacher is nearing her home. Sethe has no time to escape, and rather than see her children enslaved, she decides it would be better to kill them. She succeeds in killing Beloved and shallowly cutting the throats of her two sons before she is stopped. As Baby Suggs says of the oppressing hegemony, “[t]hose white things have taken all I had or dreamed . . . and broke my heartstrings too. There is not bad luck in the world but whitefolks” (Morrison 89). As Sethe and other blacks come to realize, even when finally free, there is no escaping the oppression, for fear and violence remain an imminent threat.

In addition to the white, upper class oppression, we also see the marginalized community’s rejection in each text, as well as the ensuing alienation and isolation each girl experiences. Carlin’s impoverished Florida community rejects her. Because of her intelligence and beauty, she is an outsider in her own community. Rather than being proud of Carlin, the community instead believes “any girl with a mind of her own was . . . an aberration of nature’s plan. . . .[and] most folks chose to celebrate a girl’s weaknesses and ignore her strengths” (Hoffman 24-25). Carlin’s community has a certain place and role for women, and Carlin, who does not wish to marry young and spend the rest of her

life barefoot and pregnant, can find no way to fit in. Miserable and feeling trapped, Carlin desperately searches for an out. She knows she will never be accepted or happy “stranded in a town where a traveling carnival was considered a cultural event.” (Hoffman 24), and if she stays in the community, she will never have the chance to follow her own dreams. Consequently, when the Haddan School offers her a swimming scholarship, she jumps at the opportunity.

Despising and fearing Charlene’s grandmother, Anna “Mercury” Thunder, the community, by extension, also shuns and rejects Charlene. For example, when Charlene blows abrasively across the microphone at a powwow, “[n]o one would chastise her . . . for fear of waking the next morning with crossed eyes or a tongue twisted like a pretzel. No one would challenge Charlene” (Power 14). Instead, the community ostracizes Charlene, talking about and ridiculing her behind her back. Charlene becomes invisible and silenced in her own community. Even when Charlene tries to fit in, the community blatantly rejects her. She bakes a macaroni casserole to take to a powwow. Very pleased with her efforts, she is devastated when she finds it thrown out and sees Harley Wind Soldier’s dog, Chuck Norris, eating it. To the community, everything associated with Mercury and Charlene is trash, and no matter how hard she tries, Charlene remains an outsider. Charlene tries to counteract the rejection, further distancing herself from the community in an effort to disassociate herself from her grandmother. While she loves to dance at the powwows, she no longer enters the competitions “because she always won. Her grandmother . . . would identify the competition and . . . [prepare] a gummy wad of bad-luck medicine. . . . The targeted dancer would sprain an ankle or succumb to a

curious case of the flu before reaching the finals” (Power 27-28). Fearing the community believes she wants Mercury to help her win, Charlene now only stands on the sidelines watching. However, the community still rejects her, and her loneliness and emptiness continue to grow. Charlene can find no way to escape the derision heaped upon Mercury and herself and no escape from the isolation imposed on her.

Denver’s rejection, much like Charlene’s, is an extension of her parental figure’s rejection. When Sethe murders Denver’s sister, Beloved, the community rejects her. From that point on, no one will have anything to do with Sethe. As Ella tells Stamp Paid, “‘I ain’t got no friends take a handsaw to their own children’” (Morrison 187). It is only when Denver begins attending school that she learns the truth. At first, Denver is so pleased with her accomplishments that “she didn’t even know she was being avoided by her classmates—that they made excuses and altered their pace not to walk with her” (102). It is not until a classmate asks her about her mother, whether Sethe really killed her own child, that Denver realizes how the community views her family. No one comes to their house, and all Denver has is her family. One by one, each of her family members leave. Her brothers, Howard and Buglar, sneak away in the night, and her grandmother, Baby Suggs, dies. These are “serious losses” for Denver, “since there were no children willing to circle her in game or hang by their knees from her front porch” (Morrison 12). Consequently, Denver sees her world as limited to her home and mother, not believing there is anything outside of this realm for her, or that she has any possibilities. When Paul D arrives at their home, Denver realizes “It had been a long time since anybody . . . sat at their table. . . . For twelve long years . . . there had been no visitors of any sort and

certainly no friends” (Morrison 12). The only contact Denver has over the years is Sethe and the ghost of her dead sister. Furthermore, she has no idea how to overcome her rejection or reintegrate into the community. Instead, she retreats into her own secret world.

Moving on to the injustice that occurs in each work, we will see how oppression and rejection influence this injustice. While each girl’s situation is different, when the marginalized community believes a character has overstepped his or her bounds and embraced too much of the dominant group’s culture, as noted earlier, injustice occurs. For Carlin, the injustice is the murder of Gus Pierce, who becomes the ghost who helps her. The injustice, while perpetrated by the dominant white group, occurs because Gus undertakes an endeavor meant to elevate him to the level of the other Haddan boys. The freshman boys in Gus’s dorm undergo an initiation and must perform a daring, often illegal, act before becoming a part of the Haddan community. However, since the boys despise Gus, they give him an impossible task, turning a white rose red.²⁴⁵ Believing he can finally escape the oppression and gain acceptance, Gus secretly sprinkles a chemical on the rose, turning it red in front of the boys. The boys believed he would fail, hence they could be rid of him. Consequently, when he succeeds “something poisonous had begun to move through the room” (Hoffman 271). The Haddan boys do not want Gus to be a part of their community and feel he has overstepped his place. Their ensuing “prank,” meant to punish Gus, goes horribly wrong, and the boys in the dorm murder Gus, disguising the crime to appear as a suicide.²⁴⁶ While Carlin feels something is not

right about Gus's death, there is no evidence to suggest anything other than suicide, and his murder goes unpunished.

Mercury and Sethe are also punished for overstepping their bounds. However, this injustice occurs at the hands of the marginalized community. The injustice in *The Grass Dancer* dates back much farther to Mercury's youth. When Mercury marries a white man and settles into a happy marriage, the rest of her Sioux community becomes envious. In fact, her cousin, Joyce Blue Kettle, snipingly tells her that everyone in the community believes Mercury married Emory "to get things" and that she is "greedy" (Power 228). Jealous of the marriage and the way Emory lavishes gifts on Mercury, the community turns against her. After Emory dies, Mercury's only consolation is their son, Chaske. When Chaske becomes ill with consumption, Mercury implores Joyce to fetch the doctor. However, in a vision, Mercury sees Joyce and her daughter, Dina, instead laughing and celebrating at a community dance. While they are at the dance, Chaske dies. It is at this point that Mercury claims the hereditary magic of her ancestor, Red Dress. Red Dress, a woman with the power to control anyone and anything, uses her magic wisely and for her people's benefit, sacrificing herself to save her people from the dominant hegemony. When Mercury taps into this magic, she instead uses it for herself, making Dina dance in the freezing winter air until she dies. From this point on, the community rejects Mercury. Furthermore, the more the community rejects Mercury, the more she delves into magic for selfish reasons, until she only uses it to please herself, and her people have completely rejected her. Thus, the initial injustice is never rectified.

Similar to that of Charlene, the injustice in *Beloved* predates Denver's memory. Believing Baby Suggs and Sethe are too proud and showy, giving "lavish" parties, the community refuses to warn Sethe that Schoolteacher is coming.²⁴⁷ Celebrating Sethe's escape and Baby Sugg's reunited family, the two throw a party for the entire community. Despite the fact that all ninety community members attend and enjoy the food and festivities, they believe both Baby Suggs and Sethe are too proud, displaying their excess in the face of the rest of the impoverished community.²⁴⁸ After the party, their anger grows, and they castigate Baby Suggs and Sethe, believing they had life easy, given that their previous owner, Mr. Garner, treated his slaves well. As Morrison relates, the community thinks

[I]oaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had. Who had not even escaped slavery—had, in fact, been *bought out* of it by a doting son and *driven* to the Ohio River in a wagon . . . and rented a house with *two* floors *and* well. (Morrison 137)

Through their pride and excess, the community believes the two are mimicking behaviors and actions of the dominant whites.²⁴⁹ Consequently, no one in the community comes to warn them of Schoolteacher's arrival in town. And, as Stamp Paid relates, it wasn't "exhaustion from a long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing—like, well, like meanness—that let them stand aside, or not pay attention, or tell themselves somebody else was probably bearing the news already to the house on Bluestone Road" (Morrison 157). The result is Beloved's murder, and even after this, the

community still refuses to support Sethe. When she emerges after the murder, they still see her as too proud, thus the community has no “cape of sound” to wrap around her and “no words” (Morrison 153)—rather than support, there is only silence. The community then persecutes Sethe for the murder, not realizing or correcting their own injustice.

Given the oppression, rejection and injustice that occurs in *The River King*, *The Grass Dancer*, and *Beloved*, it is only a matter of time before the ghosts make their appearance. At this point, time becomes out of joint and each girl becomes paralyzed, unable to properly analyze past, present, or future and unable to make the right choices in the present. While Carlin has full knowledge of her past, she is unable to disentangle herself from it, aligning her own identity with that of her mother, a woman who, she believes, is content with a simple life and little money in a town that undervalues women. She separates herself from the Haddan students, believing her lower class origins make her unworthy. Aligning herself with the “misfit,” Gus, Carlin is completely desensitized after, as she believes, an argument leads to his suicide. We see Carlin’s paralysis and how time is out of joint when Gus’s ghost appears immediately following his death. She blames herself for his death, believing “[h]er wretched actions . . . had destroyed both Gus and their friendship and gone on to form something cold and mean in the place where Carlin’s heart ought to be” (Hoffman 118). Through Carlin, Hoffman illustrates the numbness that occurs when someone is unable to “right” time. Since Carlin cannot properly analyze her past, she also cannot understand the present. “Stuck,” she neither comprehends the invalidity of Gus killing himself over an argument (his characterization negates that he would kill himself over a small argument), nor takes the proper action—

that is, she does not investigate the real reasons behind Gus's death. Instead, she quits caring about everything, cutting herself off from all social interactions, including with her boyfriend, Harry. When she does begin to feel again, she fixates on what she views as her own lack. Holding herself up to the rest of the Haddan students, she denigrates herself. Thus, as she begins slicing her arm with a razor, "[h]er own flesh was a ledger upon which she measured all she'd done wrong" (Hoffman 119). Finally spurred into action, Carlin cannot fix injustice, but only abuse herself. Her only action is to replace emotional pain with physical pain.

Unlike Carlin, Charlene has access only to a fragmented past. According to her grandmother, Anna "Mercury" Thunder, her parents died when she was a baby, leaving Mercury to raise her. While Charlene does realize there is something "off" in Mercury's explanation, specifically that her grandmother never showed her a death certificate or told her where her parents were buried, Charlene never probes further. She also doesn't probe into Mercury's past, questioning how Mercury came to practice "bad medicine," taking whatever she wants or why their Dakota community ostracizes both her grandmother and herself. The few pieces of information Charlene has are not enough for her to critique. This lack of information, in conjunction with the appearance of the ghost of Pumpkin, a half Menominee, half Irish girl whom Charlene met at a powwow and who died in a car accident leaving the dance, in her dreams, makes Charlene's time out of joint. She sees black birds flying out of Pumpkin's mouth and smashing into glass every time Pumpkin tries to speak. Because Pumpkin expressed interest in Charlene's love, Charlene believes Mercury killed her; thus she is horrified, feeling the burden for Pumpkin's death.

Furthermore, having fought so long to be viewed differently from her grandmother, Charlene quits caring. Numb, all she craves is love, no matter what it takes to get it.

Like Carlin, when Charlene does take action, it is the wrong action. Baking a love potion into cupcakes, Charlene distributes them to the boys in her homeroom class. Her total disregard for these classmates, as well as her use of Mercury's brand of selfish magic, indicates the depths of self-loathing to which she has sunk. Believing she will never find love and happiness on her own, Charlene entrances the boys in her class. Expecting more rejection, she is surprised when the boys readily accept the cupcakes. She immediately regrets her decision, thinking, "*[m]aybe they don't lump me with Mercury after all*" (Power 295). However, it is too late; "[t]here was no giving back their naïve faith, no calling off the medicine Charlene sensed rushing through her veins" (Power 295). Charlene knows that once the boys come out of it, they would realize what she had done. She will never get the boys' trust back or the real affection she craves. Charlene also realizes that her use of magic has now irrevocably linked her to Mercury.

Her decision to use the magic has even more devastating effects. Incapable of comprehending the magic's full force, Charlene becomes "aware of a growing tension; admiring eyes followed her thick figure, hearts pounded, fingers were busy writing her love messages" (Power 296). It is not happiness, but rather friction that Charlene associates with this attention. Since she has never received this kind of interest from the opposite sex before, Charlene, at first, revels in it.²⁵⁰ This feeling does not last, for she quickly sees the emptiness in this attention; it is not real or sustainable, and none of the praise offered to her has any value, since it comes not from the heart, but from a potion.

All Charlene can do is wait out the potion's effects. Naïvely, Charlene does not realize the power of having six boys simultaneously desire her so intensely. Unable to turn the magic back, she is raped and left curling "her body into a lonely ball of sore muscles and injured flesh" (Power 298). Battered and bruised, Charlene has reached the ultimate depths of despair. Not only is she alone and violated, but also she has demolished any remaining trust in her classmates.

Denver, on the other hand, completely avoids her past. As Morrison relates, Denver despises any story "her mother [Sethe] told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy [the story of Denver's birth] was all she ever asked about. The rest was a gleaming powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it" (62). In fact, the appearance of Beloved's incorporeal specter insulates Denver, and when the ghost is not active, Denver longs "for a sign of spite from the baby ghost" (Morrison 12). Focusing much of her love and attention on the ghost, Denver refuses to hear about the past and time becomes out of joint. In fact, when a classmate reveals a part of her past, Denver goes deaf, completely retreating from the world around her. Consequently, Denver cannot decipher the actions of anyone around her—neither her mother's nor the community's. Thus, Paul D's arrival immobilizes Denver, for he takes away the two things she does understand: her mother's attention and Beloved's incorporeal presence. While this nonphysical ghost invisibly and angrily strikes out at the household, Denver views it as her "only company" and is "miserable" (Morrison 19) once it disappears. She retreats to her secret boxwood bower where, "closed off from the hurt of the world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed

because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out*” (Morrison 28-29). Without Sethe’s undivided attention and the presence of Beloved’s ghost, Denver becomes numb. She feels she has no protection left from “the condemnation Negroes heaped on them [Sethe and Denver],” and her world becomes “flat” (Morrison 37). At this point, the only “solace” Denver finds is in her secret bower, where her loneliness and despair increase.

The appearance of Beloved’s corporeal manifestation furthers Denver’s displaced time. Denver’s emotions swing, and she becomes manically ecstatic in Beloved’s presence. In fact, she fluctuates between this mania and fear, both worshipping Beloved and terrified that she will disappear again. With time out of joint, Denver also cannot properly analyze her past and takes the wrong action. When Beloved’s corporeal manifestation tries to choke Sethe, Denver turns her head. While she finds Beloved’s action “troubling,” it is far more horrifying to think of losing Beloved again. Instead of protecting her mother, Denver only sits by and watches. Thus, Denver permits a new injustice to occur.

Relegated to “outsider” status, the girls have no avenue for righting present—much less past—injustice. With this in mind, the hauntings must be read on two levels of power, that of the dominant society’s oppression and of the marginal community’s rejection. Without the ghosts, each girl also succumbs to rejection. Consequently, without their cultural community’s support, they are also unable to navigate oppression. Thus, they are isolated and unable to progress in any direction; they remain paralyzed and stagnant. It is magical realism’s ghosts that form the bridge between the girls and community. As Redding says, “the ghost is a figure by which we might imagine bridges

across difference” (180). Through ghostly guidance, Carlin, Charlene, and Denver finally become a part of a community. This communal participation allows them to move forward and combat the oppression previously restricting their futures. When Carlin receives Gus’s black trenchcoat after his death, she puts it on and “[i]nstantly, she felt comforted” (Hoffman 140), something she has not felt since before coming to the school. At first, she doesn’t recognize Gus’s presence, only finding solace in the coat’s damp wool—a wool that should have been long dried. Carlin feels that the coat cloaks her in silence, protecting her from the rest of the world. It is Gus’s ghost that saves her from the desensitization, forcing her to think about both her actions and those of the people around her. Every time Gus approves of what she is doing, minnows appear. When he disapproves, stones appear. Minnows appear whenever she is near Sean Byers, the only person besides herself to befriend Gus. As the two form a friendship, more and more minnows appear. During one of their nightly swims, Carlin suddenly finds her pulse “going crazy”: “[i]t was lovely to be in the dark, alone, yet not alone” (Hoffman 236). For the first time since Gus’s death, Carlin feels both happy and comfortable with someone else. It is at this point that minnows stream through the pool. Through his guidance, Gus has nudged Carlin into a friendship and closer to community belonging.²⁵¹ As she becomes more comfortable within the community around her, Gus’s presence slowly diminishes. In the end, Carlin becomes so in tune with the society around her that when she swims in the river, even “[t]he fish had grown used to her, and they swam along beside her, all the way home” (Hoffman 324). The fact that she considers Haddan

home indicates her adjustment to and involvement in the community. It is at this point that Gus's ghost disappears; Carlin no longer feels or needs his presence.

After the emergence of Red Dress, the ghost of Charlene's ancestor, Charlene finds a power within herself she never knew she had. Previously, she was unable to stand up to her grandmother. After her encounter with Red Dress, Charlene not only denies Mercury her company, but also mounts the stairs to her room "[w]ith sudden boldness" (Power 300). This is an amazing turnaround for Charlene. Always an outsider, Red Dress not only provides the key for Charlene's acceptance into a community, but also a new, loving community. Magically, Charlene finds a news article in her desk, an article that has no source. Reading it, Charlene makes the startling discovery that her parents are still alive, and she finds herself "ready for pure action" (Power 304). She tracks down their phone number and calls from her school guidance counselor's office, despite knowing the wrath this would incur in Mercury.²⁵² Furthermore, she finds acceptance within her original community, for several members come to understand and sympathize with her, putting her up for the night so she can avoid Mercury and taking her to the bus stop in the morning. Leaving the reservation the next day, Charlene feels a happiness she has never experienced before.

Similarly, Denver feels an immediate comfort and affinity for Beloved when the ghost appears. As soon as she hears Beloved's name, "she [Denver] was shaking. She looked at this sleeping beauty and wanted more" (Morrison 53). Denver instantly develops a purpose, something she had lacked before. She diligently administers to the ailing Beloved, giving both new life. Denver even develops a "passion" (Morrison 54),

something long eradicated from her being before Beloved's emergence. Unlike the previous works, however, the guidance Denver receives from Beloved is inadvertent.²⁵³ Beloved does not intentionally help Denver, but rather her selfish actions provide guidance. At first, of course, Denver is enthralled with Beloved. However, once Sethe sees Beloved's scar under her chin and realizes she is her daughter, Denver is completely cut out. She is no longer included in the games they play, and "[e]ven the song that she [Sethe] used to sing to Denver she sang for Beloved alone" (Morrison 240).²⁵⁴ It is not until Beloved has almost completely sucked the life out of Sethe that Denver finally wakes up.²⁵⁵ Faced with a choice, Denver must choose between Sethe or Beloved, for it is obvious that only one can survive.

Beloved's possessiveness forces Denver out into her community. Visiting her former school teacher, Miss Lady Jones, she asks for help, and with this step, we see Denver's integration into her community. Neighbors begin leaving baskets of food for the family. Where before they had cut her family out, they now begin caring "whether she ate" and taking pleasure "in her soft 'Thank you'" (Morrison 250). They respect the fact that Denver "stepped out the door, asked for the help she needed and wanted work" (Morrison 256). In forcing Denver out into the world, Beloved paves the way for her acceptance into the community. Denver's actions also pull the community together, and they rally around both Denver and Sethe. Recognizing Beloved's presence as an "invasion," the women come together at the family's home, driving Beloved away. Here, Denver takes charge. Sethe, believing a local man is the slave master coming to take Beloved away, attacks him with an ice pick. Denver is "the first one to wrestle her

mother down. Before anybody knew what the devil was going on” (Morrison 266).

Through her selfless actions, not only does Denver become a part of the community that shunned her, but also Beloved disappears forever.

Unraveling Inheritance

As we will see, this ghostly guidance helps each girl sort through their convoluted inheritances. According to Derrida,

[a]n inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to reaffirm by choosing. ‘One must’ means one must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. (16)

For Derrida, the specter represents history and inheritance, and it is not until we wrestle with the ghosts that we can come to a full understanding of our inheritance and what that inheritance means to us as individuals. As Derrida says, the “specter demands that one take its times and history into consideration, the singularity of its temporality or of its historicity” (101). Given that each girl stands outside the dominant and communal groups, on the margins of the margins, their understanding and knowledge of their inheritance fragments. Just as they do not understand why their community isolates and rejects them, neither do they have full access to or understanding of their inheritance. What little they have managed to piece together is not enough to give them a full picture. Consequently, basing their identities on what little they do know, they form negative,

self-deprecating identities. It is only through the ghosts that the girls finally come to sort through and understand what their inheritance is.

First, we will see how the ghosts help each girl sort through and understand their inheritance. Furthermore, we will also examine how comprehending the past allows Carlin, Charlene, and Denver to renegotiate not only their identities, but also previous ideologies surrounding their sense of self and their view of the world. For Carlin, Gus's stones and minnows provide the key to unraveling her inheritance and its relationship to her identity. Whenever she is with Harry, "she would discover a stone in the pocket of Gus's coat. . . .The floor of Carlin's closet was now covered by a collection of such stones" (Hoffman 226). Carlin begins to recognize Gus's guidance, feeling his "disapproval whenever she was with Harry" (Hoffman 195). Given her community's view of women and Carlin's belief that her poverty makes her a lower class citizen, Carlin is delighted when Harry, the most popular and handsome boy at school, begins paying attention to her. Her low sense of self worth makes her unable to see Harry for the "monster" Gus says he is.²⁵⁶ Consequently, she quickly and unquestioningly begins dating him, finding conditional popularity, acceptance, and love. Only with Gus's ghostly guidance does she begin to suspect Harry's motives and true personality, a situation compounded when, a few nights after Gus's death, she stumbles across all his dormmates in a secret meeting in the woods. When Carlin startles them and sees their expressionless faces, she feels fear, for "the way they were staring brought to mind the bands of wild dogs that roamed the woods in Florida. . . .*They could hurt me if they wanted to*" (Hoffman 144). As Carlin begins to understand the specter's actions, she also

comprehends her mistake, blindly and trustingly loving Harry.²⁵⁷ Through Gus's guidance, Carlin finally starts sifting through her inheritance, one entrenched in views of women as devalued and of socioeconomic status as defining self worth. She realizes that these views have tainted her perceptions of herself, allowing her to be sucked into a harmful relationship. She comes to understand that because of her own self-deprecation she became enamored of Harry in the first place.

However, it takes a little more ghostly pushing before Carlin fully explores inheritance, identity and ideology. Given her experiences with Harry, she is terrified to find herself falling in love with Sean, despite the minnows that appear whenever she is near him. Afraid of being vulnerable and exposed, she assumes that all relationships portend disaster, and she pulls away from him. Furthermore, she denigrates herself, "disgusted with herself for having been with Harry, as though she'd been contaminated somehow" (Hoffman 248). Having no faith in herself, much less others, she pushes Sean away. Consequently, Carlin becomes even more withdrawn and isolated than before, feeling "[a]ll the world out there was liquid, all of it enough to pull her down" (Hoffman 298). Instead of facing her fears, she runs back to Florida and the life she so desperately wanted to escape. She settles into a rote life, hanging out with childhood friends, drinking beer, and watching TV. Through her despair, she not only "settles" for the same life she once denounced, but also completely loses what little sense of self worth she had. When her friend, Johnny, praises her intelligence, she jumps on him, denying who she really is. When he addresses this, she replies, "'I don't know what I am. . . .I have no idea'" (Hoffman 320). Again, it is Gus's guidance that allows her to completely sort

through her inheritance. Once she begins seeing the stones, she becomes more aware of the people around her. She is surprised to discover that

[p]eople were nice to . . . [her] and several girls she'd known in grade school came over to tell her how great she looked, in spite of the haircut. Lindsay Hull, who had never included Carlin in anything, went so far as to invite her to the movies on Saturday with a group that went to the mall together on a weekly basis. (Hoffman 320)

Suddenly, Carlin realizes that she has misjudged both her community and her inheritance. With Gus's help, her ideology shifts, and she realizes her potential and capabilities as a strong and independent woman, recognizing that money and social status do not dictate a person's value. As she watches the New England weather on T.V., she knows not only that she will return to Haddan, but also that she will succeed, and she happily embraces a new life and a new ideology about her own self worth.

Given that neither the community nor Mercury relates any information to Charlene about her past, Charlene has no clue as to why she is rejected, other than that the community fears and despises Mercury's magic. Consequently, she not only believes Mercury makes her an outsider, but also develops the ideology that a "lack" lies within her. This view of herself, in turn, leads to her self-deprecation and eventual rape. Thus, when Charlene does receive ghostly guidance, it is very abrupt. While still at the abandoned house where she was assaulted, Charlene realizes "*I'm not alone*" (Power 298). It is here she sees the ghost of her ancestor, Red Dress. Red Dress very bluntly tells her,

“I’m going to say this only once, so you better sober up and listen. . . . You misused the medicine because you have a bad example. If you are selfish with it, someday it will be selfish with you. We do not own the power, we aren’t supposed to direct it ourselves. Give it up if you don’t understand my meaning. Put the medicine behind you.” (Power 299)

Red Dress’s words strike at Charlene. For the first time in Charlene’s life, someone has exposed her grandmother for what she truly is. Understanding her inheritance fully, she knows the magic must only be used for good. Abusing the magic, as Mercury does, will only lead to devastation and despair. Red Dress’s words provide the guidance Charlene needs to change both herself and her path. Taking the words to heart, she finally seizes control of her life, understanding that if she wants to attain the love she desires, she must stand up to her grandmother and become her own person. This guidance emboldens Charlene, and she does not hesitate to contact her parents once she finds the news article. Again, we see Charlene reevaluating her inheritance once she finds her parents. As she puts the pieces together, she finds that she is not alone, that she can find love and affection with no strings attached and that she is not the worthless individual she had perceived herself to be. For Charlene, understanding her inheritance also means abandoning what was passed down from Mercury for something new—an inheritance from loving, selfless parents.

While on the bus taking her to her parents, Charlene receives one last bit of ghostly guidance. Charlene is “startled to find the roof of the bus gone, sliced away” (Power 309). Peering outside the open bus, Charlene again sees Pumpkin, dancing alongside. She sees the birds, once again, emerge from Pumpkin’s mouth. She flinches,

waiting for them to die. However, this time “the birds . . . darted away. . . Quickly, easily, the birds flew past her teeth. . . Charlene coughed, but the birds coasted down her throat” (Power 309-10). Here, Charlene is finally liberated. Renowned for their song, it is significant that the birds come out of Pumpkin’s mouth and glide easily down Charlene’s throat; it is Pumpkin releasing Charlene and helping Charlene find her voice. Furthermore, the fact that they come from Pumpkin indicates Charlene’s need to forgive herself. Thus, Charlene finally can fully evaluate her inheritance. Away from her grandmother, she comes to peace with herself and abandons the selfishness that surrounded both her and her grandmother. With this last vision, Charlene quits blaming herself for Pumpkin’s death and understands “*It wasn’t your fault. . . These things happen. There was nothing you could do*” (Power 310). The ghostly guidance empowers Charlene. She transforms from the frightened, lonely girl who uses magic in the same, selfish way as her grandmother into a woman who understands that love is given. With these realizations, Charlene “laughed, the relief lifting her out of her seat. She danced up and down the aisle, from one end of the bus to the other. She swallowed the birds and heard them sing, *It wasn’t your fault*” (Power 310). Thus, the ghosts help Charlene renegotiate her identity and ideology. Charlene comes to see that she is someone capable of love and of loving, and that these things are possible without the power of magic and the control it exudes. The road that lies ahead of Charlene is now full of hope as her grandmother diminishes into the distance.

Beloved’s consumptive possession is what guides Denver, forcing her to address her inheritance. Whereas before, Denver retreated into her own world of selfish need,

she is now faced with Beloved's even greater, unhealthy desire. In fact, Beloved immediately stakes her claim on her mother, unable to "take her eyes off Sethe. Stopping to shake the damper, or snapping sticks for kindling, Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required or told to" (Morrison 57). When Denver tries to stake her own claim on Beloved, the ghost tells her "'She [Sethe] is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have'" (Morrison 76). It becomes increasingly apparent that Beloved needs the same, unconditional love from Sethe that Denver craves from Beloved. However, Beloved also needs more; she needs Sethe to pay for what she did. Beloved becomes a vampire,²⁵⁸ and when she cannot get enough of Sethe, her desire becomes consuming. Sethe devotes all her time and energy to Beloved. When she loses her job, she doesn't even bother to search for a new one. Instead, "Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk" (Morrison 240). When there is little food left, Beloved gets it all. Thus, as she grows fatter, Sethe becomes thin and frail, as if Beloved is feeding on everything Sethe has. Beloved's possessiveness and demand for love moves beyond even Denver's to the point where there is no satisfying her, and the ghost's threatens Sethe's very existence.

Therefore, Beloved forces Denver to sift through her inheritance, deciding whose actions are worse: those of Sethe's past or Beloved's present. Whereas before, she always chose Beloved, now Denver chooses Sethe. She now realizes that Sethe's actions were motivated by love, whereas Beloved's are based solely on revenge. As painful as

her inheritance is, Denver finally stops seeing Sethe as a monster, and she understands how lonely her world would be without Sethe. Thus, Denver is forced to take action. Realizing she must seek outside help, Denver “stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch. . . . Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again” (Morrison 243-44). Denver’s ideology mirrors that of Sethe’s: the outside world is terrifying and danger lurks at every corner. However, Denver finally faces her fears, something she would not have done had it not been for Beloved. She soon finds that what had terrified her, what she had found overwhelming, is actually very “small.” As Denver progresses through the neighborhood, her confidence grows. She becomes self-assured in a way she had never been before. Emboldened, she picks her way through the Cincinnati streets, finding a job through which she can support Sethe and Beloved. As Denver comes to understand her inheritance, her self-confidence and self-reliance continue to grow. She even applies for a second job and goes back to school, with plans to attend college. Thus, through Beloved, Denver’s sense of self and ideology are completely transformed; Denver not only comes to realize her own self-worth and capabilities, but she also comes to understand her inheritance. And she realizes how family, community, and self all are tied to the same violent history, and how that history must be navigated before the self is empowered. Once she comes to this understanding, the fearful, lonely child in Denver disappears forever.

In addition to helping the girls sift through their inheritance, and, in return, transforming their sense of self and their ideologies, the ghosts also pave the way for a

more ethical future for each girl. When Carlin, Charlene and Denver shift from feelings of self-deprecation to worthiness and develop more positive, open ideologies, they also shift from inward to outward-looking individuals. Instead of focusing solely on themselves and their problems, they are now free to interact with and observe the world around them. In doing so, the self-centeredness and destructiveness that existed before is eliminated, and they now care about the people around them. Additionally, each girl's entrance into their community furthers their compassion and care for others. As seen with Carlin, those she formerly despised from her hometown and from the Haddan School now become friends, friends whom she wants to protect and help. In fact, she discovers that simply returning to school inspires many of the teens in her hometown, for they also see possibility for themselves. Charlene, of course, sets the magic aside. She knows it is not right to use it against others and also feels remorse for having used it on her classmates. Furthermore, she understands Red Dress's words and realizes the magic should only be used to help others. Finally, Denver not only comes to rely on her community, but also comes to realize that every bit of good she does will be returned. Additionally, she comes to delight in the friendship and help the community provides, happy to help them just as they help her. Thus, each girl turns away from her initial selfishness, delighting in the new feelings that accompany the help she gives and care she shows her community.

Prior to this spectral guidance and because of their rejection, Carlin, Charlene and Denver are confused, improperly identifying what they view as their parental figures' inadequacies as their true inheritance. The girls find nothing positive on which to base

their own identities and ideologies. As Carlin observes, she “was nothing like her mother, and for that she was grateful” (Hoffman 24-25). Carlin is afraid she will fall into the same “trap” as her mother, one that she sees as both devaluing women and providing no opportunities for growth. Carlin sees Sue impetuously hopping from one relationship to another, never finding what she needs; consequently, she can find nothing of value in her mother’s lifestyle. Carlin, thus, develops the ideology that the only thing that matters and gives a person value is his or her economic status. Given this, it is no surprise that she creates a new background for herself, one in which she has a father and her parents work for the government, traveling around the world. She believes this is “[a] far better tale to tell than one that included a mother who worked the cash register at the Value Mart, [and] a father she’d never seen” (Hoffman 29). For Carlin, there is no explaining a mother who is poor and content with her life, despite the fact her lifestyle offers nothing. Carlin also needs to account for her lack of material possessions. Since “she and her family weren’t the sort of people who’d had time to gather personal affects or put down roots,” Carlin feels her story implies that her family is “better than that . . . superior in some deep and moral way” (Hoffman 38). As the story Carlin tells Haddan students about her background illustrates, status and wealth are all the matter in the world.

Given her early losses of both her husband and son, Mercury’s love for her family becomes all-consuming. Charlene, however, sees this love as unhealthy and selfish. She also believes that all Mercury’s motivations are self serving. Charlene first comes to this conclusion when watching Mercury go after men. Whenever Mercury wants a man, she puts a spell on him. Therefore, “[a]ll of Mercury’s lovers appeared addled, exploited by

the magic she stirred with spoons. When Mercury was finished with a man she would let him go, and sense would come back into his eyes” (Power 32). Thus, Charlene believes that, for Mercury, love is solely about power and control, and there is no denying Mercury what she wants, not without devastating repercussions.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, Charlene believes Mercury applies this same selfish love to her own family, and she sees her grandmother’s actions as responsible for her communal rejection, which, in turn, gives Mercury what she wants—Charlene all to herself. In fact, when Charlene tells her she is in love with Harley Wind Soldier, the son of the one man Mercury could not obtain through magic and about whom Charlene says, “[y]ou can’t help who you love,” Mercury simply responds, “[y]es you can. You love yourself, you love your family, and you don’t let your feelings run around and jump into someone else’s hand” (Power 13). While Charlene sees this comment as another example of Mercury’s selfish idea of love, in actuality, Mercury is an overprotective parent. But Charlene does not see Mercury as such, and given her rejection from the community, Charlene develops the ideology that she does not deserve love, and that her existence can only be one of loneliness and emptiness. Also, the more Mercury’s love suffocates and isolates Charlene, the more her ideology is reinforced. Reaching desperation, Charlene tries to escape through school. Unable to study at home, Charlene goes to school early, “but once there she discovered that her grandmother had raided her textbooks and torn out half the pages in each volume” (Power 287). Completely cut off from all but her grandmother’s love and weeping over her ruined books, Charlene realizes that “*Grandma has shut me out of the*

world” (Power 287), and she sees no hope of ever alleviating or escaping her loneliness and isolation.

Sethe is also guilty of loving too much, which is what leads to her murder of Beloved. However, Denver does not understand Sethe, and thus, she both loves and fears her mother. In fact, when she first learns the truth about Sethe, “odd and terrifying feelings about her mother were collecting around the thing that leapt up inside her” (Morrison 102). She begins having dreams about her mother cutting her own head off. Both as the only source of companionship and as her mother, Denver loves Sethe. Since she does not understand her mother’s motivations, she is terrified of her, wondering if Sethe will eventually kill her. As Denver claims, “I don’t know what it is, I don’t know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again” (Morrison 205). Later, Denver tells herself, “Don’t love her too much. Don’t. Maybe it’s still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children. . . . I spent all of my outside self loving Ma’am so she wouldn’t kill me” (Morrison 206-07). Denver doesn’t see the “thing” inside Sethe as love, but as something monstrous that can emerge with no provocation. The only thing Denver understands is that her mother is capable of turning on her at any moment. Consequently, Denver only learns fear from Sethe, and this fear shapes Denver’s ideology, for she sees the world around her as a terrifying place that she must avoid at all costs, for, if she enters that world, she runs the risk of being “swallowed” up. Given this, Denver stifles her potential—better to hide away than face what lurks out in the world. Since each girl draws from her inheritance from her parental figure and develops a harmful ideology, it is no surprise that Carlin, Charlene and Denver

are all adrift. They have no way of gaining admittance into the cultural communities from which they are isolated and no stable foundation for establishing their own identities and ideologies.

Given the ideologies each character adopts, it is no wonder that each is consumed with fears that only reinforce the self-deprecating views. Furthermore, cut off from the rest of the world, they cannot help but develop negative identities. Carlin, Charlene, and Denver's steady diet of disparaging social feedback lends itself to their negative views of themselves. This negative view is first seen in Carlin, who continually holds herself up to the Haddan students and finds herself lacking. She repeatedly emphasizes her poverty. Coming to school with only \$150 to her name, she is

dressed in a cheap pair of jeans and a T-shirt she'd purchased at a secondhand store. . . . Anyone could see she didn't fit in with the other well-dressed passengers. . . . She had swamp dust on her feet and nicotine stains on her fingers, and came from a universe of hash and eggs and broken promises, a place where a woman quickly learned there was no point crying over spilled milk or bruises left by some man who claimed to love a little too hard or too much. (Hoffman 26)

Carlin's poverty and understanding of what it means to be a woman, set against the Haddan students' wealth, makes her self-deprecating. She tears herself apart, continually comparing herself to the other students and only finding a cheap, unsubstantial image. Later, she feels "little knobs of doubt rising beneath her skin. Who was she to think she could forge such a completely different life for herself" (Hoffman 26). She imagines the gossip that would ensue if the students ever found out the truth: "Wouldn't they love to know that her supper often consisted of sandwiches made of white bread and butter?"

Wouldn't they be amused to discover she used liquid detergent to wash her hair because it was cheaper than shampoo" (Hoffman 43). Carlin sees her poverty as a stain that somehow makes her inferior to and less consequential than the other students.

This view of herself carries over to the only relationship—her friendship with Gus—that she establishes at the school. Gus sees himself as a failure, viewing "his own life as a prison sentence. . . .he existed in a sub-universe, a world of losers, a world of pain, located in the basement of reality, several levels beneath the realm of pretty faces and possibilities" (Hoffman 28). Even Gus's dormmates torment him. Recognizing a kindred spirit, so to speak, "Gus was the first person she'd truly felt comfortable with since her arrival in Massachusetts" (Hoffman 42-43). Only because Gus shares a similar, self-deprecating view of himself can Carlin get close to him. Thus, the two are isolated together, neither believing they have anything special to offer.

Charlene also tears herself apart; there is not a single aspect about herself that she is pleased with. Her self-deprecation comes through in her focus on her appearance. At one point, she is "squeezed into a fussy old-lady's dress her grandmother had made. Tiny print daffodils were scattered across Charlene's chunky figure, a field of flowers straining against her abdomen. She thrust her hands into the deep patch pockets to hide her fingers" (Power 63). Later, she stands in a circle with her classmates, making sure that "her back to Harley Wind Soldier because he was her favorite. She couldn't bear to have him watch her, notice the scratches on her short legs . . . and see the battered slippers with heels worn down unevenly" (Power 63). Charlene finds nothing pleasing about her appearance and fears that the other students will mock her. In her own disparaging view,

she is too fat and wears outdated clothing.²⁶⁰ Ostracized from the community and drowning in her grandmother's "love," Charlene feels herself "shrinking." She can find no self worth and nothing in herself that would make her attractive to others.

Denver's negative identity also is manifested in her community's view of her family. Knowing they despise Sethe, Denver becomes mousy, directly correlating this feedback with her sense of self-worth. In fact, Denver's only feelings of self-worth come from Beloved. When the ghost stares at Denver, "[i]t was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other" (Morrison 118). Denver feels that everyone else who looks at her judges and criticizes, always finding her inadequate. This feeling does not occur with Beloved, thus Denver begins basing her entire identity on Beloved's reactions to her. When she fears Beloved has once again disappeared from her life, Denver begins crying "because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing" (Morrison 123). Without Beloved, Denver has neither a sense of self-worth nor a sense of self. She ties her entire being to Beloved, refusing to examine who she truly is. When she finally must leave the property, her low self esteem is reinforced. Seeing a woman wave at her, "Denver lowered her head" (Morrison 245), unable to even meet the eyes of her community member. She also keeps "her eyes on the road in case they were whitemen; in case she was walking where they wanted to; in case they said something and she would have to answer them" (Morrison 245). Denver both believes and projects that she is nonessential. Not only the dominant, white culture, but also her own community members can easily eradicate what little sense of self she has.

Prior to the ghostly guidance, these negative views of self become crippling for each girl. For Carlin, this means completely detaching herself from all her classmates. When the rest of the Haddan students congregate in one train car, talking and laughing on their way to school, Carlin separates herself, sitting “in the last car. . . in the farthest seat” (Hoffman 24). She immediately assumes the students will not like her; therefore, to prevent “inevitable” hurt, she closes herself off. Consequently, she is quickly identified as a loner, spending “too much time on her own to be one of the crowd” (Hoffman 34). No matter what the gesture made toward her, Carlin sees it as a slight.²⁶¹ She begins sneaking out at night, after everyone in her dorm has gone to sleep. She does not seek social interaction, but rather refuge in the school cemetery, whose “cloistered location offered the sort of privacy Carlin had been searching for” (Hoffman 40). In fact, Carlin prefers “keeping company with the dead rather than having to put up with the girls of St. Anne’s. At least those who’d passed on did not gossip and judge, nor did they wish to exclude anyone from their ranks” (Hoffman 40-41). Carlin believes she is excluded; however, she has never given the girls a chance. Instead, she anticipates their reactions, and withdraws rather than make herself vulnerable. She retreats into herself, becoming more lonely and unhappy with each passing day.

Charlene and Denver, on the other hand, develop a possessive love. We first see this in Charlene. Desperate, she believes even a weekend friend would help alleviate her lonely, empty feeling. Since her only hope for friendship and companionship is through the powwows, which draw Native Americans from all over, (people who wouldn’t be familiar with Mercury Thunder and her magic) a friend for the weekend is

all the more Charlene can hope for. When Charlene sees Pumpkin at a powwow, she immediately hopes for such a friendship. However, Charlene's oppressive love for Harley interferes. Pumpkin tells Charlene, "I had my eye on him [Harley] too" (Power 29). Charlene's possessiveness and anger swell. Pumpkin's interest in Harley eradicates any hope for friendship Charlene has, for it poses a threat to Harley's affection. Charlene immediately references her grandmother's magic, wishing "for a quick moment that she had a little of her grandmother's fire so she could warn the girl away from Harley, spitting: *I have powerful medicine, and can turn it on you like that!*" (Power 30). Instead, she turns and walks away. She is still lonely and friendless, but she is not willing to indulge in selfish magic, for the time being.

Later, when Charlene sees Pumpkin and Harley together, she is infuriated, delighting when Pumpkin stumbles during a dance. Charlene realizes she "could have Harley Mercury's way if she wanted. . . . Harley would be dazzled by Charlene. But it wouldn't be real. Harley's eyes would be empty and his efforts to please too desperate" (Power 33). While she contemplates magic again, Charlene only wants real love and friendship. However, her possessive and unattainable love for Harley ruins her one chance for true friendship. The sight of Pumpkin and Harley together tears her apart, and she is devastated when the two leave together. She knows Pumpkin is different than other girls, for "Charlene had never seen Harley take interest in a girl before. He kept to himself and his many admirers consoled themselves with Frank [Harley's best friend]" (Power 35). Charlene realizes that Harley's love is now completely unattainable, which both angers and saddens her. When Pumpkin is killed in a car accident shortly after

leaving the powwow, Charlene is overcome with guilt. She not only regrets her own thoughts about using magic, but also fears her possessive attitude toward Harley spurred her grandmother into taking action. It is at this point that Charlene's nightmares about Pumpkin ensue, and she is trapped, feeling her possessiveness lead to Pumpkins death. Thus, she alienates herself even further from the community.

As with Charlene, Denver's possessive love for Beloved is all consuming. Even her reaction to the nonphysical manifestation of Beloved's ghost is radically different from the rest of her family's. Her family views the ghost as a burden, the price they have to pay for Sethe's violent crime. Denver, however, feels a deep bond to Beloved. This bond is first established after Sethe kills Beloved. Nursing Denver, still covered with Beloved's blood, "Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (Morrison 52). Later, Denver expands on this link, claiming,

Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk. The first thing I heard after not hearing anything was the sound of her crawling up the stairs. She was my secret company until Paul D came. He threw her out. Ever since I was little she was my company and she helped me wait for my daddy. (Morrison 205)

For Denver, the bond is more than one of blood formed in infancy; it is one of suffering as well. Beloved is Denver's only tie to the rest of the world, as well as her only companion. Thus, whereas the rest of the family only wants to eradicate the ghost, Denver clings to Beloved.

Beloved's actions often have a direct correlation to Denver's emotions. For example, when Denver loses her hearing after hearing the truth about Sethe, it is

Beloved's ghost that brings her hearing back.²⁶² It is also "[f]rom then on the presence was full of spite. . . .there was pointed and deliberate abuse. . . .the spite became so personal it drove each [Buglar and Howard] off. Baby Suggs grew tired, went to bed and stayed there until her big old heart quit" (Morrison 104). Denver's growing, internalized pain and anger seems to feed the ghost; the more Denver's pain grows, the more violent the ghost becomes, eventually driving the family away. In fact, we learn that Denver's "monstrous and unmanageably dreams about Sethe found release in the concentration Denver began to fix on the baby ghost. . . .Now it held for her all her anger, love and fear she didn't know what to do with" (Morrison 103). Beloved becomes Denver's solace, the one entity she completely trusts and onto whom she can shift all her fear and sadness.

Through her loneliness, all of Denver's love goes to Sethe and to Beloved's ghost. In return, she requires their undivided attention. This need for attention is evidenced through her unwillingness to hear any stories not about herself. Denver does not want Sethe's thoughts on anything but her; therefore, she does not want to hear or think about a time or place where she didn't exist. Despite her love for Sethe, Denver's love for Beloved is far stronger and far more possessive. In fact, she even prefers Beloved above Sethe, not caring what harmful actions Beloved takes against her. Denver believes, as Baby Suggs told her

that I shouldn't be afraid of the ghost. It wouldn't harm me because I tasted its blood when Ma'am nursed me. She said the ghost was after Ma'am and her too for not doing anything to stop it. But it would never hurt me. I just had to watch out for it because it was a greedy ghost and needed a lot of love. . . .And I do to. Love her. I do. She played with me and always came to be with me whenever I needed her. She's mine. Beloved. She's mine. (Morrison 209)

Beloved is everything to Denver. Having no one else to share her life with, the ghost is her one companion and friend through everything. They are united in their pain and anger over Sethe's murder, united through the blood Denver takes in, and united in their quest for love. Beloved makes Denver's loneliness and isolation more bearable and provides an "outlet" for Denver's internalized emotions.

As a result of all this, Paul D's appearance at their home is an intrusion, taking both Sethe and Beloved from Denver. Paul D's arrival immediately arouses Denver's jealousy. She hates the way Sethe and his talk excludes her. Sullenly, Denver retreats to the stairs, upset that "[t]hey were a twosome, saying 'Your daddy' and 'Sweet Home' in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father's absence was not hers" (Morrison 13). Ignored and angry, Denver blurts out "[w]e have a ghost," and is delighted when "[t]hey were not a twosome anymore" (Morrison 13). Denver is repeatedly insolent to Paul D, even asking him "how long he was going to hang around" (Morrison 43). Paul D is unwanted competition for Sethe's attention and affection. Feeling lonelier than ever, she retreats to the boxwoods, "thinking everybody had somebody but her; thinking even a ghost's company was denied her" (Morrison 104). Thus, when the ghost begins tormenting Paul D, there is a "vague smile on her lips" (Morrison 18). Denver hopes the ghost will drive Paul D off, just as it had her brothers. But it doesn't. Instead, Paul D drives the ghost out of the house, devastating Denver. Now Denver is completely alone, "her mother upstairs with the man who had gotten rid of the only company she had" (Morrison 19). Beloved's disappearance is the worst thing

that could possibly happen. With her mother's connection to Paul D and the ghost gone, Denver has no one.

However, Beloved does not remain gone for long. While Paul D, Sethe, and Denver are at the carnival, a corporeal Beloved emerges from the water and sits down on a stump in their yard. Just as Denver recognized the invisible ghost as Beloved, she also immediately realizes that the corporeal woman is Beloved returned. In fact, it is as if Denver has called Beloved back to her. Paul D even comments before Beloved's return that Denver has "'a waiting way about her. Something she's expecting and it ain't me. . . . whatever it is, she believes I'm interrupting it'" (Morrison 41). Beloved also mirrors Denver's jealousy over Paul D, resenting the amount of attention he consumes. When Beloved catches the two alone, she feels like crying. Also, Beloved is angry "when Sethe did or thought anything that excluded herself" (Morrison 100), and she is both sad and angry when Paul D takes away any of her time with Sethe. At this point Beloved does what Denver had been waiting for all along; she "moves" Paul D out of the house. First Paul D is no longer comfortable in Sethe's bed and then he feels discomfort in the rocker. Within days, he is no longer comfortable in the house. By the time Beloved is finished moving him, he is sleeping out in the cold house on sacks of sweet potatoes. Finally rid of Paul D, Beloved and Denver couldn't be happier, for they have Sethe all to themselves.

Despite the women's happiness, there is a disturbance at 124. Stamp Paid, the only one in the community who bothers to approach the house, immediately notices this disturbance. As he nears the home, "he heard a conflagration of hasty voices—loud,

urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out what they were talking about or to whom. . . .All he could make out was the word mine” (Morrison 172). The word “mine” mirrors the possessiveness within the house, and creates the barrier Stamp Paid cannot break through, even though he attempts to knock on the door six times. This possessiveness is first seen in Denver. In her greed for love and attention, Beloved’s return makes her obsessively jealous. She repeatedly refers to Beloved as “mine.” When Beloved first arrives, exhausted and ill, and sleeps for days, Denver refuses to leave her side. For the four days that Beloved sleeps, “Denver tended her, watched her sound sleep, listened to her labored breathing, out of love and a breakneck possessiveness that charged her” (Morrison 54). This devotion only increases once Beloved regains her health. Denver lies to Sethe when Sethe says ““Paul D says you and him saw Beloved pick up the rocking chair single-handed”” (Morrison 56). Denver is not going to lose Beloved again.

In fact, Denver becomes paranoid that Beloved will leave or that Sethe will “kill” her again. She “worried herself sick trying to think of a way to get Beloved to share her room. . . .She won’t put up with another leaving, another trick” (Morrison 67). Beloved leaving again would be the last straw for Denver. When Beloved disappears in the ice house, Denver crumbles, only regaining composure once Beloved reappears. Everyone she has ever loved has abandoned her, and, having lost Beloved twice, she is not going to lose her again. Denver’s need for Beloved and fear of her leaving is so strong that Denver does not feel secure unless Beloved is in her sight. Denver’s obsessive love becomes so strong that she believes “[n]othing was out there that this sister-girl did not

provide in abundance” (Morrison 76). For this reason, she turns a blind eye to Beloved’s own actions toward Sethe. When Beloved chokes Sethe in the clearing, Denver chooses Beloved over Sethe. She is “alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for Sethe, but she felt helpless to thwart it, so unrestricted was her need to love another” (Morrison 104). In Denver’s eyes, Beloved becomes everything and the only “being” deserving of her love. And, at first, she is willing to sacrifice her mother to keep this love.

However, in the end, it is through ghostly guidance that Carlin, Charlene, and Denver come to reassess both their own self views, as well as their ideological outlooks on life. Previously, their ideologies revolved around their own inadequacies and emptiness, which, in turn, paralyzed each girl, keeping her from exploring her full potential and realizing her own value. Through the spectral, each girl comes to realize her own self worth, something communal rejection had previously obscured. In this manner, we have broadened Derrida’s theories of spectral intervention. For Derrida, the spectral intercedes on behalf of a dominant groups oppression. However, what we see in each of these models is a correlation between dominant oppression and the marginalized community’s rejection. Interceding, the ghosts provide the necessary bridge between character and community, allowing each character entrance into her community, while also helping her shift her ideological perspectives of self and the world around her. Thus, the spectral helps the girls navigate *both* dominant oppression and the marginalized community’s rejection. Setting aside the negative view of self each had developed, she finally grows as an individual. Following the guidance, Carlin, Charlene, and Denver are able to take charge of their lives. Carlin returns to school, knowing she can and will

succeed. Charlene abandons the reservation and seeks the love and comfort her parents offer, and Denver finds the outside world is not as frightening as she thought, delighting in her future work and education options. Furthermore, they also sort through their mottled inheritance. In doing so, not only do they come to an understanding about their community, but also about themselves. Each girl comes to realize how community aids in her development as an individual. Carlin, Charlene, and Denver also see how their inheritance influences their lives, and it is not until they navigate that inheritance that they understand the world around them. Thus, magical realism helps them set aside their fears, and each girl is empowered and strengthened through her ghostly encounters. As Derrida says of ghosts, they are the “untimely specters that one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back” (87). Critiquing each ghost, the three girls open themselves up to new worlds and possibilities, overcoming the stifling fears that kept them rooted in a stagnating perception of the world. Ultimately, we see Carlin, Charlene, and Denver emerge as strong, self-assured women in charge of their own destinies.

CHAPTER V

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BODY'S GONE? DISSOLUTION, DEATH, AND THE UNKNOWN IN KATHERINE VAZ AND STEVEN MILLHAUSER

The previous chapter examined how ghosts act as cultural agents, helping each girl overcome communal rejection and escape their previous isolation and loneliness. Doing so also allows each character to reassess her negative views of self and find self worth. Thus, the ghosts empower each girl, allowing her to function in a world from which she was previously separated. In this chapter, we will further explore magical realism and the effects of the magical's cultural agency. In Katherine Vaz's "Math Bending Unto Angels" and Steven Millhauser's "Rain," magical realism, in the form of bodily dissolution, provides characters the opportunity for complete liberation, severing attachments to the physical world as well as eliminating fears of death and the unknown. Water, the key component for the dissolution of both Clara ("Math") and Mr. Porter ("Rain"), also offers stimuli for the imagination; only when characters delve into their imaginative side do they pave the way for the understanding and freedom that comes from dissolution. Doing so allows them to reevaluate their perceptions of the world around them and look outside the self and their own small world that immediately affects them. Reliance on logic alone, on the other hand, traps and restricts characters,

exacerbating their fears and heightening their attachment to the physical world. Both authors use magical realism to illustrate the importance of imagination for this process to occur as well as the fear and paralysis that occurs when the characters narrowly focus on themselves.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard examines this link between water and imagination in *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Bachelard posits that there are two types of imagination that must be nurtured: the formal and the material. According to Bachelard, formal imagination arises from “feelings and the heart,” while material imagination “stems *directly from matter*” (1), and the way matter feels to the touch.²⁶³ While Bachelard applies these concepts to poetics—to the texts themselves—we see the ideas reflected in both Vaz’s and Millhouser’s characters. The characters echo Bachelard’s view that “meditation on matter cultivates an *open imagination*” (2). In both stories, water is the obtrusive and unavoidable matter that each character must confront. As we will see, it is only when the characters actually think about the water, throwing themselves into it and throwing their fears aside, that open imagination begins to occur, removing the fear and physical restrictions formerly in place. Both “Math Bending Unto Angels” and “Rain” illustrate, therefore, what happens when one relies too heavily on the rational: the imaginative is ignored, leaving characters fearful and clinging to the material. The dissolutions, as we will see, indicate the need for a blending of formal and material imagination and logic. Acting as a cultural agent, the dissolutions not only provide a pathway for this melding, but also provide the opportunity for the reevaluation of ideologies on death and the unknown—that death is

the end of existence and it, as well as the unknown, only holds fear. Finally, magical realism also shows how ego and subjectivity are created through ideas of death. As we will see, the more the characters are physically attached to the world, the more repressed are their egos. However, enlargement of ego through imagination and dissolution alleviates or eliminates this attachment, allowing them to overcome the repressions that stifled them before, increasing their functionality in the world, and making them more open-minded.

Magical realism itself is ideal for this examination, as it is a style that frequently questions assumed notions of reality.²⁶⁴ The style's magic, often acting as a cultural agent, pushes questions and possibilities about the world to the forefront. The magical calls attention to ontological questions that avoid rational explanations, bringing the mystery back. In fact, Wendy B. Faris claims that magical realism "can be seen . . . as a manifestation of a perennial cultural need, for a sense of contact with cosmic forces that extend beyond material reality and the individual and for discourses that accommodate that contact" (74), and that it "constitute[s] a latent tendency to include a spirit-based element within contemporary literature—a possible remystification of narrative in the West" (65).²⁶⁵ Faris goes on to note that the Western world, particularly the literary world, has long been hostile to anything related to the spirit or spiritual. As she suggests,

magical realism can be seen to open up a space of the ineffable in-between that accommodates the camouflaged presence of the spirit amid material reality. . . .from a religious perspective, it constitutes an incipient re-emergence of spirit or the sacred. And it is this last that has been the most neglected because it is the most alien to modern Western critical tradition, including, especially, literary and cultural criticism. (Faris 68)

Therefore, the dualistically fractured world (split along the lines of logic/imagination, material/spiritual, known/unknown) found in Vaz's and Millhouser's stories mirrors that of our own world. Faris argues that "magical realism seems to hold out the possibility of healing the split between concrete and imaginary, or science-based and spirit-oriented worlds" (87). Thus, magical realism highlights the unknown, suggesting that there is something more than just the physical world around us.

That the magical acts as a cultural agent in both authors' works is no surprise, given their backgrounds and worldviews. Vaz, who is Portuguese American, is heavily influenced by both her heritage and her Catholic upbringing. Her family emigrated from the Azores to California during her grandfather's generation, and it is the blending of the magical and miraculous in Portuguese stories and Catholicism that Vaz brings to her writing. Not only does this cultural influence come across in the short fiction found in *Fado & Other Stories*, but also in later works. Her novel *Saudade* (1994), which details Clara's life from her childhood in the Azores to her later relationship with her husband, Helio, in California, is filled with magical realism, as is *Mariana* (1997), the fictionalized account of the life of the 17th century Portuguese nun Mariana Alcoforado, famous for her love letters to a French Calvary officer. Vaz speaks candidly of Portuguese legends, such as that of the young King Sebastião who died in battle in 1578 and who is prophesized to eventually return with the mist. She also speaks of magical stories from and of her own family as well as her own experiences with ghosts.²⁶⁶ As for Catholicism, Vaz says the religion has "deeply" influenced her writing:

I can't imagine it not being a part of who I am. I was raised on the stories of saints and the idea that things can be ornate and lush. . . . You were hoping for a miracle, hoping for something unexplicable to happen. And I was raised very Portuguese. We went to the different festivals and the big parades during Pentecost. (qtd. in Slates par. 12)

These traditions heavily influence her view of imagination. Vaz believes “[t]his cultivation of the miraculous is open to us all if we believe that our memories and imagination provide unlimited vision” (“My Hunt” 54). Vaz urges us to go beyond reality, through imagination, in order to capture what is miraculous and magical. She sees magical realism itself as “finding a voice for the imagination which is not unconnected from reality—it’s not making things up. One can speak of metaphors and be speaking of real things” (qtd. in Slates par. 2). Thus, imagination is key to unlocking truths about reality and opening our eyes to the magical.²⁶⁷

Millhauser, on the other hand, keeps his background private. In fact, very little is known about his life, other than that he grew up in Connecticut, attended several colleges, and resides in New York state. Many critics have remarked on the limited information about Millhauser as well as the small number of interviews he gives.²⁶⁸ However, as Jim Shepard writes, Millhauser has an “enduring conviction . . . that his work alone should do the talking; that nearly anything else the writer has to offer is either an impertinence or an unacceptable approximation of what it was the writer really wished to express” (76). What is known is that there is a magical quality found in all his writings. Speaking of Millhauser’s first novel, *Edwin Mullhouse*, Shepard calls it “magically illuminating,” and goes on to declare that “[n]ine books later, Steven’s work

is still all about magical illuminations” (76).²⁶⁹ As with Vaz, Millhauser views imagination as a pathway for transforming views, and magical realism aids this process, for it defamiliarizes the ordinary, allowing characters and readers to reevaluate their perceptions. Millhauser says,

I’m reluctant to say that fiction ought to do one thing rather than another. I do know what I want from fiction. I want it to exhilarate me, to unbind my eyes, to murder and resurrect me, to harm me in some fruitful way. But that said, yes, the journey into intense feeling and the conquest of unknown emotional territory is something fiction can make possible. (qtd. in Shepard 77)

Fiction should provide new insight into the world around us, and Millhauser’s use of magical realism does just that. In fact, in both authors’ stories, magical realism’s cultural agency, through dissolution, provides the pathway for escaping physical attachment and ego repression, moving toward something more universal.

For this reason, it is important to examine the way each author addresses ideas of death and the unknown. In “Math Bending Unto Angels,” Helio begins working on equations he believes will transform his wife, Clara, into the angel he believes her to be. At the same time, both Helio and Clara know that the completion of these formulas and her transformation means she will leave behind both her corporeal form and the world, so they quickly set the equations aside. They understand that there is something more than their immediate experiences, yet they are unwilling to explore what is outside themselves, fearing what they see as the loss of “self” that comes with that exploration. Consequently, both fear death and the unknown, clinging to the material and the

immediate as if nothing else existed. Their view indicates that this world is the only world, death being the eradication of their existence. While Helio does reference angels and seems to believe in them, his repression only brings about fear; thus he refuses to let Clara go, believing she will be lost to him.

“Rain,” however, begins with an ordinary summer storm. As the rain continues pouring down, though, it begins blurring and dissolving Mr. Porter’s world. This blurring, in turn, highlights his certainty that nothing exists beyond the material world, for the more it dissolves, the more fearful Mr. Porter becomes. As the story progresses, Mr. Porter’s belief in the stability and permanence of his physical reality begins to erode. Unable to disentangle himself from this world, Mr. Porter’s trust in its permanence is shattered, and he is forced to address his view the more it dissolves away. In the end, as with Clara and Helio, he is forced to address his view and reexamine his life and his convictions about life.

Neither author references death to any degree. Clara and Helio never mention death in regards to Clara’s dissolution, and the subject only comes up, briefly, three times. In both stories, death is dissolution, and dissolution forces a choice between what is finite (a narrow and self-focused view of the world) and what is infinite (an open view of the world that goes beyond the self). Only when Helio fears God might take Clara away, when he worries about how his own death will affect Clara, and when Clara’s father’s death is mentioned do these references occur. All three references focus on the body, or rather the elimination of the bodily presence. Mr. Porter, on the other hand, never mentions death. Instead, he obsessively focuses on the bodily, indicating his belief

that the person disappears with the corporeal. In fact, death is highlighted primarily through implications—each character’s fears and the complete dissolution of Clara’s and Mr. Porter’s bodies—in both “Math Bending Unto Angels” and “Rain.” In this way, we see how death informs subjectivity, for the characters are attached to the physical and fearful, seeing death as a threat to the self. Therefore, they completely avoid the subject. The dissolution transforms them, allowing for the expansion of ego, the elimination of fears and the relinquishment of their physical attachment. Each story’s initial focus, then, is, broadly, the unknown: what is mysterious, unanswered, or unexplained in the world.

Both authors indicate their own fascination with the unknown. Vaz writes of her own induction into the unknown as a child. As a student in a Catholic school, she was assigned a research project on a 20th-century saint, Maria Goretti. After beginning her research, Vaz was delighted to discover that the unknown, the miraculous, still tinged the world. As she writes, her discovery “that sainthood, the yearning to be touched by God, and the heady realm of miracles were not relegated to distant times and specially anointed people, but spoke to our world, to us—they *were* us” opened her eyes to the world around her (“My Hunt” 52).²⁷⁰ In fact, Vaz credits her family for many of her views about the unknown. She cites her father’s response to a question about his poor navigational skills as a guiding principle. Her father’s response was “that navigation was simply the art of heading into the unknown until one had to stop—more about embracing mystery, shall we say, than calculations” (“Songs” 222). This view permeates “Math Bending onto Angels.” Once Clara and Helio accept the water, they continually question the unknown,

with almost childlike wonder. For both, what is unknown is always possible and the world is full of miracles.

Similarly, Millhauser also explores the unknown in his works. As he comments in an interview, “[f]iction is adventure or it’s nothing—nothing at all. What’s an adventure? An invitation to wonder and danger. If what I write doesn’t lead a reader into the woods, away from the main path, then it’s a failure” (qtd. In Shepard 77). For Millhauser, fiction must challenge its readers and open their minds. This is something he also sees in the world around him. He finds it amazing that “the world is there, presenting itself to us ceaselessly, and yet it remains largely invisible,” and he believes “the simple fact that objects don’t reveal themselves completely to sight . . . [is] a symbol of the general invisibility of the world. . . . We walk through a world continually disappearing from view” (qtd. in Shepard 80).²⁷¹ Millhauser’s view echoes that of Vaz: that the world is full of mystery and there is far more that is unknown than known. This perspective dominates “Rain.” Mr. Porter is consumed with what is unknown.²⁷² However, he ignores the wonder of the unknown around him, continually trying to make all around him known. When this attempt fails, he panics; his understanding of the world as rational, orderly and wholly explainable is undermined. Mr. Porter believes the physical world is absolute and unchanging, as we will see, and that it conforms to established rules. This, in turn, provides him stability; he feels he knows exactly what to expect from the world around him; thus, he does not need to explore anything beyond his limited perceptions of the world.

Two important ideas are revealed through these authors' comments: 1) there is always mystery and awe to be found in the world and 2) our own perceptions help create this awe and mystery. The first point echoes many scholars' comments: that something exists beyond the material world around us. The second notion denotes the significant role our own perceptions play in creating reality. Vaz supports Millhauser's claims, believing in the importance of watching and listening "for the nonvisible within ordinary moments and ordinary people" ("Songs" 226). Vaz's statement not only highlights that the miraculous hides within the world, but also leaves its discovery to the individual. We repeatedly see this view highlighted in each of the stories. Clara and Helio's individual perceptions reveal the wondrous to both themselves and the reader in "Math Bending Unto Angels." While Mr. Porter remains oblivious in "Rain," his rigidity shows the readers the horror that awaits them if they uphold views similar to his own. Expanding on the importance of human perception and imagination in *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*, Douglas Hofstadter believes we all have "slips." According to Hofstadter, "[i]n everyday thought, we are constantly manufacturing mental variants on situations we face, ideas we have, or events that happen, and we let some features stay exactly the same while others 'slip'" (641). These slips are imagined scenarios that allow us to (re)create reality. Inherently, humans take what is ordinary and make it into something more fantastic. Hofstadter also believes these "'almost' situations and unconsciously manufactured subjunctives represent some of the richest potential sources of insight into how human beings organize and categorize their perceptions of the world" (642). As he points out, each person's slips indicate what he or she is looking for, hoping

for, or dreaming about; whether it's as simple as imagining what would happen if the coffee pot were left on or more fanciful like a daydream about being a famous actor or singer. Through each character's slips, we will see exactly what they are looking for as well as how the individual's perceptions either expand or stagnate as the dissolution nears.

Hofstadter further stresses the importance of perception and imagination. As he says, "[t]hink how immeasurably poorer our mental lives would be if we didn't have this creative capacity for slipping out of the midst of reality into soft 'what if!'" (643). His words indicate that humanity has a need to believe in and question the unknown, and that our imagination plays a key role in this process. Understandably, each characters' observations and imaginations influence the way he or she perceives the surrounding world. These perceptions also affect their views of death and the afterlife. Additionally, it is magical realism that provides the characters the opportunity, through dissolution, to alter their perceptions. As we will see, Clara and Helio develop the ability, as Paul Bloom notes, to "perceive the world of objects as essentially separate from the world of minds, making it possible for us to envision soulless bodies and bodiless souls" (109).²⁷³ In doing so, Clara and Helio are freed. No longer fearing death, they understand that existence exceeds the body. However, Mr. Porter is unable to make this separation. Relying heavily on a more logical view, he remains trapped in a purely physical world. Furthermore, as this world dissolves around him, he is unprepared for and horrified by its instability, for, if anything, the world's stability was the one thing in which he had faith. The magical realism in each story, then, also illustrates the way subjectivity and

imagination, when linked with the logical, shift perspective outward and away from the self only.

Consequently, each story reflects certain divisions in cultural ideologies about death, and it is magical realism's dissolution that provides characters the opportunity to resolve these conflicting views. In fact, the ideologies in conflict are often existentialistic rather than religious or spiritual views. On the one hand, existentialist ideology posits that there nothing exists beyond this world, that the only meaning we will find is through our own actions while alive.²⁷⁴ As Barbara Forest says, "[d]eath consciousness also surely plays a significant role in the effort to find meaning in our existence; each individual's certainty of death exerts a more pronounced pressure to locate a source of meaning" (865), adding that "[m]eaning in the highest sense is derived from whatever enables an individual to live with a sense of worth and importance—a belief system, a purpose, a mission" (864). For those who adopt this viewpoint, as can be seen in Mr. Porter, their perspective becomes narrowly focused on the self, and life becomes nothing more than survival. The opposing view, which is often connected with the religious or spiritual, acknowledges that existence is more than what can be found or even seen in this world. Paul Bloom asserts that, "[t]his belief system opens the possibility that we ourselves can survive the death of our bodies. . . .that when the body is destroyed, the soul lives on" (110). As many scholars have noted, fear of death is widespread, whether it be among those with an existentialistic viewpoint or those who believe in an afterlife. According to Brian Nyatanga, this fear often revolves around the "assumption that death itself creates a state of non-existence and nothingness in those who are presumed dead"

(643). The view of death as loss, as Nyatanga believes, informs much of this fear. As Nyatanga says, “[i]t is more the consequences of death than death itself that people fear. Death causes a multitude of losses and at different levels. . . .Death disrupts the possibility of further life and the realization of one’s aspirations” (644, 643). Thus, even for those who believe in an afterlife, there is still a tendency to rely and focus on the physical world, fearing the unknown. In this way, to varying extents, most people contend with an existentialist viewpoint. As David P. Barash observes,

[o]ne of the organizing principles of existentialism is the basic notion that human beings have no ‘essence’. . . .For the existentialists, human beings define themselves, give themselves meaning, and establish their essence only via their existence: by what we do and how we choose to live our individual lives. (1012)²⁷⁵

Each character, to differing degrees, reflects this existentialist ideology. Initially, all that they are and all that gives their lives meaning is tied to this world.²⁷⁶ Therefore, the thought of death is terrifying, for it indicates all that they have to lose as well as the possibility that the unknown offers nothing.

The second ideology about death that emerges is that it is a continuation of the soul only in a nonphysical form.²⁷⁷ Cultural beliefs, as Paul Bloom posits, open

the possibility that when the body is destroyed, the soul lives on. It might ascend to heaven, descend to hell, go off into some sort of parallel world, or occupy some other body, human or animal. Indeed, the belief that the world teems with ancestor spirits—the souls of people who have been liberated from their bodies through death—is common across cultures. (110)

While the belief in the continuation of existence or the soul is widespread, abandoning fear of death and embracing the unknown is difficult for most, since what is unknown offers no consolation. Both “Math Bending Unto Angels” and “Rain” demonstrate a dissolution that offers each character the chance to transform previous ideologies on death and the unknown. Furthermore, this ideological shift offers them true liberation, eradicating their fears and severing their attachment to the material world. The repression of the ego alleviated, as we will see, they are able to see beyond the self and open their eyes to the world and wonders around them.

For magical realism, via the magical, to act as a cultural agent, the imagination must first be engaged. Daniel Chapelle posits that we must reactivate “the imagination that can imagine, and reimagine, unknowness itself. That way we can once again . . . see where unknowness hides everywhere in plain view, in this endless parade of events that creation puts on every day and that we know as everyday life” (196). Through imagination, Clara, Helio, and Mr. Porter realize that there is more to reality than what can be experienced through the senses or the physical. Not only must both the formal and material imaginations be engaged, but also must a blending of both imaginations with logic transpire. As Bachelard says of poetic creation, a “grafting” occurs when there is “a union of dream-producing and idea-forming activities” (10).²⁷⁸ Bachelard asserts that the joining of logical “production” and “idea” to the creative “dream” and “forming” is necessary for both fruition and progress. As we will see with Vaz’s Clara and Helio, it is the fusion of formal and material imaginations with logic that leads to ideological transformation through dissolution. On the other hand, Millhauser’s Mr. Porter is a prime

example of what happens when such fusion does not occur and both types of imagination are stifled. Rejecting imagination, Mr. Porter closes himself off to the possibilities it offers. Rather than a release, Mr. Porter feels only horror when his dissolution begins. Porter does not allow what Bachelard terms the “dual participation” necessary “[f]or the material element to engage the whole soul” (11-12).²⁷⁹ Dissolution provides characters understanding and liberation when they engage imagination and blend it with their logical tendencies. Of course, one cannot truly “know” the unknown, but rather the characters come to an understanding about it: 1) that they need not fear the unknown and 2) infinite new experiences and knowledge are available when they open themselves up to the unknown.

While water can symbolize many different things, one of its dominant representations is death.²⁸⁰ Both stories utilize this symbolism. First, they each provide the initial representations of water as a dark and formidable force. Second, Clara’s and Mr. Porter’s final dissolution into death occurs at the end of each story. In both “Math Bending Unto Angels” and “Rain,” the portrayal of this symbolism and possibility it offers is dependent on imagination, as seen through the differences in Clara and Mr. Porter’s reactions. When characters are open to the imaginative, combining it with the logical, the waters offer change and renewal through death, bringing about a more open-minded view of the world and the unknown. As Bachelard says, “daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death. . . . Thus water is an invitation to die” (6, 55). Despite the association of water with death, Bachelard also emphasizes that this can be a “daily” occurrence, signifying that water can

offer a continual cycle of death and rebirth, continual change and possibility. However, when logic consumes both Clara and Mr. Porter, the waters are ominous and absorbing. The water indicates the characters' attachment to the physical and their close-minded world views as well as their restricted ability to function in the world around them. Bachelard describes these "deep waters," not as a "substance that is drunk" but as "a substance which drinks. It *swallows* the shadow like a black syrup. . . . Their waters fulfill an essential psychological function: to absorb shadows, to offer a daily tomb to everything that dies within us each day" (54, 55).²⁸¹ In some cases, deep water fulfills this function in the two stories, but in all cases dark water does so. Deep/dark waters pose a threat to existence, for they only offer death. This type of water, with its impenetrable attributes and its ability to eradicate the corporeal, emphasizes each characters' fears, fears which logic intensifies.

For those obsessed with logic, water's death and dissolution is not comforting, but rather terrifying. Initially, Clara, Helio and Mr. Porter all uphold the idea of dissolution as the complete loss of the self.²⁸² The characters project this view of dissolution as material eradication and loss, as we will examine, onto the world around them. Helio fears the water will harm Clara, and rushes home when he knows the rain is pouring down on her. Clara, her father having drowned, sees the water only as a source of death and loss. Mr. Porter associates nothing but terror with the water, and the darker the rain and the night, the more panicked he becomes. The characters illustrate, as Bachelard says, that the deep/dark water is attributed to "fateful destiny, death, and suicide," thus "we should not be surprised to find that for so many people water is the melancholy

element *par excellence*. Better yet . . . water is the *melancholizing element*” (90). While Bachelard refers to it as a “reverie,” the characters’ mindset narrows their focus to the bodily or physical only. This focus is particularly evident in Mr. Porter, whose world “chaotically” blurs and erodes in the rain. Bachelard posits that “[t]he first to be dissolved is a landscape in the rain; lines and forms melt away. But little by little the world is brought together again in water. A single matter has taken over everything. ‘Everything is dissolved’” (91-92). For Mr. Porter, the character who adamantly clings to logic alone, this is the necessary result of dissolution; only loss is possible through dissolution. Mr. Porter is incapable of understanding the larger implications of dissolution, and instead fixates on the material. Thus he illustrates the concept that those who cannot delve into the imaginative only see that “[w]ater dies with the dead in its substance. Water is then a *substantial nothingness*. No one can go further into despair than this. For certain souls, *water is the matter of despair*” (Bachelard 92). It is this view, as we will observe, that Mr. Porter upholds to the very end, a view that offers no consolation.

In fact, each character’s reliance on the logical leads to an unhealthy and detrimental attachment to the physical. As Ted Peters notes, “[t]he downward looking soul constricts itself and contaminates itself with what is physical, what is ephemeral and subject to deterioration and death” (388). All three characters, at one point or other, connect their entire being to the corporeal, their attachment indicating their close-mindedness. In this respect, dissolution provides the opportunity for enlarging the ego, paving way for open-mindedness and a more universal, rather than self-centered, world

view. According to Freud, the ego essentially serves as the buffer for the id; rationally-oriented, it keeps the passions in check.²⁸³ Drawing from the physical world, the ego also is tied to the bodily and bodily senses.²⁸⁴ However, it can become too repressive, and as Freud says

[f]rom this ego proceed the repressions, too, by means of which an attempt is made to cut off certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from their other forms of manifestation and activity. In analysis these trends which have been shut out stand in opposition to the ego and the analysis is faced with the task of removing the resistances which ego displays against concerning itself with the repressed. Now we find that during analysis, when we put certain tasks before the patient, he gets into difficulties; his associations fail when they ought to be getting near to the repressed. We then tell him that he is dominated by a resistance; but he is quite unaware of the fact, and, even if he guesses from his feelings of discomfort that resistance is now at work in him, he does not know what it is nor how to describe it. (16)

We find this repressed ego in all three characters. While Helio understands the universal implications of Clara's dissolution, he also fears losing the corporeal Clara, believing this to mean the complete loss of Clara. Mr. Porter, on the other hand, is closed off to anything outside himself. He ties all that he is to the world around him; thus, his anxiety becomes obsessive, and we see how this view leads to stagnation. As Freud notes, when the ego becomes too repressed, "we land in endless confusion and difficulty if we cling to our former ways of expressing ourselves and try, for instance, to derive neuroses from a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious" (17). The characters' attachment, then, illustrates how ideas of death repress the ego. Consequently, each character stagnates in his or her own fears, unable to see anything beyond the self or even function

in the world around them. The characters, therefore, struggle with ideas of ego, and their difficulty lies in expanding the id, becoming more open-minded and seeing beyond those individual, small worlds.

On the other hand, for those who do combine the imaginative and logical, dissolution becomes a journey full of new possibilities. When this combination occurs, as Bachelard says, those individuals find their “image in the destiny of water,” becoming “a part of depth or infinity” (12). When imagination is linked to water, the ability to see beyond the finite possibilities of the bodily into a more infinite reality arises, as with Clara and Helio. However, when imagination is not linked to water, as with Mr. Porter, an inability to disentangle the self from the material world arises. Also, a part of those who are “dedicated” to water dies every day, as with Cara and Helio, and yet another part, another idea and/or imagining, is born daily. As Bachelard says, water is changeable, a “transitory” element that always flows. Imagination allows for the recognition of this process. Open imagination allows characters to escape physical confines and fears, transcending their “immediate” existence, and water becomes “the new movement that beckons us toward a journey never made. This materialized departure takes us away from earth’s matter” (Bachelard 75).²⁸⁵ Again, this connection to water allows those who “dream” of water to transcend their physical bonds. As we will see with Clara, Helio, and Mr. Porter, it is the imaginative relationship to water that each must navigate, and each’s final determinations illustrate the power and liberation found in the combination of logic and imagination.

Harmonizing Imagination and Logic

As noted earlier, dissolution provides the opportunity for ideological shifts, allowing characters to expand egos, abandon physical attachment, and see beyond the self. Clara's ideological transformation is complete when the dissolution begins. As she dissolves, becoming the very rain around her, Clara abandons her attachment to the material world. She relinquishes all the suffering she felt before: her grief over her father's death and her fear of death itself. Clara no longer has any doubt that her spiritual essence will remain, even after death. This conviction is reaffirmed through her last words to Helio before the rain carries her away: "'Come with me!'" (Vaz 54). Knowing the dissolution of her body is not the end, but rather a beginning, she begs Helio to join her and readily abandons her physical form for the possibilities the unknown holds. Later, returning with the summer storms, she asks Helio "what was his heart's desire now that the wide world out there was hers" (Vaz 55). In this way, she reaffirms the view of the soul's continuation both through her return and through her revelation that everything is now hers to experience. In this way, Clara learns to look beyond the self, overcoming earlier repressions and seeing how she is connected to everything else. The dissolution liberates her from bodily confines; she no longer sees herself as an isolated individual, but as someone who can touch all others through her new watery form.

Clara's dissolution also has a positive effect on Helio. Prior to her dissolution, he is terrified of losing Clara. However, once she dissolves, his own ego expands; he realizes that Clara's soul will continue without her material form, and his fear of losing

the corporeal Clara dissipates. Relinquishing his attachment to Clara, Helio knows that “[i]t is only by giving up ‘this’ world that you will gain ‘the other’” (Koestenbaum 184). He recognizes that the “other” world is one of liberation, and “[w]here you go I am *therefore an angel too*” (Vaz 54). Even though Clara’s body is gone, her spiritual essence will always remain, and they are forever tied together. In this way, Clara’s dissolution also liberates Helio, and former repressions, such as his fear of death and his restricted focus on the self and the physical, are eliminated. While he remains in the physical world, he can see that there is more to existence than himself and Clara. Helio also understands his role, realizing that “he needed to be flesh remembering her flesh. ‘People aren’t angels enough’” (Vaz 54). As “people,” Helio recognizes his attachment to the physical, as well as the fact that he is not ready to follow Clara. While Helio is not liberated bodily, he is liberated in thought. This transformation only occurs after Clara’s dissolution. Where once he was terrified of losing her, Helio now “held out his hands to collect the storm and call it an angel, as she had taught him to do. This would be how he would hold her for the rest of his life” (Vaz 54). The dissolution then, acting as a cultural agent, lets Helio relinquish these negative aspects, making him stronger and more in tune with the world around him. Death is no longer meaningless, but rather the soul’s continuation, and Clara is evidence of this.

Despite the fact that the dissolution offers Mr. Porter the opportunity to expand his ego and achieve liberation, he does not take advantage of this. Mr. Porter’s obsession with and dependence on the physical illustrates his ego’s repression and is indicative of the story’s ending. With his dissolution, we see his shirt

running down in blue streams onto his pants, his pants were trickling onto his shoes, his shoes were flowing away in inky streams. Everything was washing away. His cheeks were running, his eyeglasses were spilling down in bright crystal drops, flesh-colored streams fell from his shining fingertips, he was dissolving in the rain. (Millhauser 161)

The graphic depictions of his clothing and body simply dripping away place the emphasis on the physical. Not once do we get inside Mr. Porter's mind, illustrating his own theory that once the body is gone, so is the person. Thus, when Mr. Porter's dissolution is complete, "[i]n ripples of blue and flesh and tan and black he flowed into the shine of the tar. For a moment on an empty parking lot a bright puddle gleamed, but then the rain washed it away" (Millhauser 161). Here, we see the last of his corporeal presence, the colors of his clothing and body, dissolved away. The nothingness into which he dissolves indicates just what he believes of death and the unknown. Once he is gone from the physical world, there is nothing more for Mr. Porter. Consequently, Mr. Porter only has a limited shift in perspective, rather than a complete ideological shift. This limited change in his perspective stems, as we will see, from his recognition that the world does not always obey logic, something he experiences as the unknown creeps into his own reality. However, since his imagination is stifled, Mr. Porter has no way to process this discovery. Instead, it only heightens his fears, and he remains closed off to the possibilities dissolution offers.

For ideological shifts to occur through dissolution, characters must combine logic and imagination, rather than rely on logic alone. Examining each story, we see the role that imagination plays in opening the characters' eyes. In fact, only when they explore

their imaginative sides do they begin to open their eyes and see there is more than just the self. Furthermore, where repression and fear previously restricted their functionality in the world, imagination, particularly when coupled with the dissolution, allows them to be engaged and to become an active participant in the world. Hence, the melding of both types of imagination and logic, then, is of utmost importance in the two stories. Only when this melding occurs can the characters look at reality as something more than the corporeal. This blending is seen most fully with Clara. At first, Helio's logic consumes Clara, and she fears everything she associates with death. Through Helio's urging, however, she begins exploring her imaginative side, both formal (imagination emanating from the heart or emotions) and material (imagination emanating from the way matter feels to the touch). When Helio hangs strings through their house so she can practice flying, she immediately engages her formal imagination. She relishes the way they make her feel and "being subject to their laws was joy; joy took happiness and made it sway" (Vaz 46). From this point on, Clara delights in her formal imagination.²⁸⁶ She also delves into her material imagination. Previously afraid of the water, Clara finally dives in after Helio's encouragement. Through the water, Clara develops a deeper understanding of the unknown's possibilities, for "swimming was incredible, like changing death into something without a body, weightless" (Vaz 44). Clara melds the logical, her own thoughts, with the imaginative—both how and what she feels, reveling in the sensation. Combining imagination and logic, Clara experiences the world in a new way. While she is still afraid of death, she finds joy and liberation in the bodiless sensation both swimming and the strings provide.²⁸⁷ Questioning her original fears, she realizes that if

this sensation can make her feel so good, it cannot be feared. In this way, she begins to understand that the corporeal is not necessary for existence and her fear of the unknown begins dissipating.

The melding of imagination and logic is complete when Clara finds the solution to Helio's equation for transforming her into an angel. Dancing in the rain, Clara tells Helio that angels are rain, "[w]ater that can be held and not held!" (Vaz 51). While Clara has always associated water with death, her father having drowned, she now understands the larger connection between the two. Through the imaginative, particularly when she engages the material, Clara's ideology begins to shift from her earlier repressed views. Death does not mean the end, but rather, like water, it is an infinite continuation. Furthermore, she understands that those who have died are always around, always touching and slipping away. Given this new understanding, Clara's fear of the unknown diminishes. Therefore, when the purple crocus tells her how to change into rain, change into an angel, she shows no hesitation in relinquishing her bodily form. Instead, she imagines the places she can travel and the freedom that comes with dissolution. For the first time in her life, Clara lives spontaneously, delighting in the wonder she finds in her life among the stars and strings in her home as her ego begins to expand and incorporate the world around her.

For Helio, the blending of the imaginative and logical does not occur as completely as with Clara. Helio primarily explores his formal imagination, combining it with logic. As with Clara, imagination lets him reexamine the world around him. When focused solely on logic, Helio is fearful, the physical being his only indication of

existence and reality. Through his imagination, Helio realizes that there is more to the world than he can see. For example, when he worries that his dental tools will cause his patients' pain, he grafts the tools to sugar cane believing they would "allow him to probe the teeth of his patients more sweetly" (Vaz 43). When the stalks do not grow, he applies how he feels, his immense love for Clara, to the "plants," fastening pictures of her to each tool. Not only does the imaginative let him set aside his fears, but also it provides answers and solutions that logical reality does not. When Helio blends his formal imagination with logic, he is able to put things back into perspective.²⁸⁸ In this way, he understands that there is something more than only this world and this reality; possibilities previously obscured are revealed as his ego begins shedding repression. Thus, this combination of imagination and logic begins to open his eyes and actively engages him, paving the way for his transformation though Clara's dissolution.

Mr. Porter, on the other hand, does not explore either his formal or material imagination, relying solely on the rational. Because of this focus, his ego remains repressed; for Mr. Porter, there is nothing more than this world and his limited reality. In fact, what little imagination he has is aligned with his direct, "logical" experiences of the world. For example, when he sees a telephone booth across the street, "[h]e imagined the telephone ringing in his empty house. . . .His cat would prick up her ears before slowly settling her chin on her outstretched paws" (Millhauser 161). Nowhere in his imagining is there anything even remotely fanciful; it is simply based on his own, rather mundane, reality. Even when he does stretch his imagination toward something more fanciful, he still keeps it rooted in the rational, as if he cannot even picture anything outside his own

reality. This rationality is particularly apparent in two comparisons he makes related to the fictional theatrical world. In the first, a red-haired woman emerges next to him out of the rain. Having just studied a “Coming Attraction” poster with a red-haired woman in it, Mr. Porter’s reasonable comparison is that this woman “seemed to have sprung from one of the colorful Coming Attractions” (Millhauser 156). Later, when a passing vehicle splashes water onto his windshield, he sees the wipers

bowing left and right, left and right, like twin actors on a stage. The applause has died down, the audience is making its way to the exits, but still they bow, left and right, left and right, though the audience has left long ago and the lights are out in the deserted theater. (Millhauser 159)

Never do these comparisons even remotely hinge on the imaginative. He does not create new scenarios, but leaves his comparisons ingrained in the very boring details of his own experiences. As Anthony Viscardi comments, “[w]hen we immediately classify new and unknown into preexisting categories of the known and understandable, we halt the ability to speculate, to imagine ‘what if’ and the object becomes static and one-dimensional” (18). His ideology traps him in a reality that has physical and logical limitations, and he is closed off to anything outside himself. Indicating the harmful nature of this ideology, Mr. Porter’s world becomes stagnant, and he becomes increasingly reliant on the material world around him. When the world around him does not comply with his own beliefs, he becomes terrified.

Incapable of relinquishing his fears, his imagination then turns toward the morbid. This turn further indicates the negative aspects of this ideology, for what is deathly is

terrifying, signifying the complete eradication of one's existence. Mr. Porter transforms inanimate objects into representations of death and the unknown, illustrating this view.

The further Mr. Porter is distanced from what he knows and recognizes, the more intense the images become. For example, once he leaves the well-lit commercial area, he notices that "the stores and bars and rainbows were replaced by large ghostly houses flanked by shadowy trees" (Millhauser 158). Fearing what he cannot see, Mr. Porter transforms simple neighborhoods into something unnatural and threatening. The same thing occurs when he reaches his exit ramp. He sees "the tall misty pillars of the thruway, and soon he was rising slowly into the air along sleek entrance ramp" (Millhauser 159). The pillars become imposing, and rather than driving up the acceleration ramp, he "rises," as if some supernatural force is carrying him away. When he has to abandon his car near the end of the story, a nearby phone booth reminds him of a "coffin" (Millhauser 160). Refusing to explore the root of these images, Mr. Porter subconsciously fixes his fear of death onto inanimate objects. Death is all around him and all consuming. Unlike Clara and Helio's, his imagination does not balance his logic, but merely becomes an extension of it.

Therefore, when the unknown impinges on his tidy world, Mr. Porter's eyes remain closed. As the rain blurs and dissolves the world around him, it shakes his faith in the world's stability. In fact, Mr. Porter is both afraid and confused, for the world no longer conforms itself to his rigid expectations. Having dismissed the imaginative, he has no way to reexamine the world, but only knows the basis for his beliefs is crumbling. Since he cannot overcome his ego's repression, what does not belong to this reality becomes a

threat to his existence, and as such it intensifies his fears, restricting even his ability to function.

Mr. Porter's growing fear and confusion, the erosion of his beliefs about reality, and his disconcerting dissolution into nothing indicate his flawed perspective. Only when he must abandon his car to the water does he finally question both his corporeal being and his life. Once out of his car, Mr. Porter finds himself "up to his knees in water" (Millhauser 160). Rather than immediately seeking higher ground, "he felt like lying down in the water and closing his eyes, he imagined his body at peace, drifting away in the dark water" (Millhauser 160). He does not find comfort in the unknown, but rather resigns himself to what he feels is inevitable. For Mr. Porter, his physical being is everything; it is what makes him Mr. Porter. This view is indicated through the fact that he believes his body will be at peace: once his body is gone, so is he. Thus, he is drifting away in the "dark water"; there is simply nothing but darkness and nothingness. This belief is most apparent near the end of the story. Realizing that he is dissolving in the rain, he asks, "[h]ave I wasted my life?" (Millhauser 161). Even near the end, he is still asking questions about his physical being. Not once does he stop to think that there might be more than the material world around him. Mr. Porter's repressions remain in place, fueling his anxiety. Though given countless opportunities, Mr. Porter cannot expand his ego, and his eyes remain closed. When faced with his imminent dissolution, he simply assumes that there is nothing more to life, worrying about what he hasn't done.

The Effects of Ego and Repression

Prior to the dissolutions, we see the influence that the characters' repressed egos exert and how this influence affects their ideologies. In fact, Clara, Helio and Mr. Porter all are oblivious to their repression. As Freud says, there is often "something in the ego itself which is also unconscious, which behaves exactly like the repressed . . . [producing] powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious" (16-17). Thus, the ego clinches their attachment to the material world, and their focus solely on the logical exacerbates their fears of death and the unknown. The ensuing ideology dismisses anything imaginative and/or unknown as illogical, restricting the three characters to only that which is explainable, that which they can sense. Additionally, the logical also impinges on Clara, Helio and Mr. Porter's view of water, as seen in their initial response to dark water. Their reactions reflect their ideology about death as the complete end of their being. This viewpoint does nothing to engage their imaginations, nor does it help disentangle them from the rational with which they are consumed. Instead, they become more preoccupied with the material, focusing their undivided attention on it. This focus, in turn, intensifies their fears to the point where even normal daily activities become terrifying, inhibiting their ability to function. In the end, the characters must turn away from their dependence on the rational and their attachment to the physical in order to find both comfort and to become engaged in the world around them.

First, we see how the bodily influences the restrictions on each character's ego. For Clara, repression means avoiding everything that has to do with death, including thoughts. When Helio begins plans to transform Clara, she "did not ask what he was doing or thinking" (Vaz 44). Thinking means actually having to confront her fears, something she is not willing to do on her own. In fact, she finds the idea of being an angel "scary if she thought about it" (Vaz 44). Rather than confront her fears, Clara completely buries them, embracing all that is physical. Instead of asking Helio what he is thinking, she "ran her hand down the curve of his back" (Vaz 44), initiating a sexual encounter. After making love to Helio on the kitchen table, Clara finds it "great that for an hour later some crumbs stuck to her back because that was proof that she was loved" (Vaz 44). Clara needs to feel Helio, or at least a remnant of Helio's love, to reassure herself. Later, she thinks this physical feeling is important "because when a person was not there anymore how did you stop from saying Love me, even when you are gone, do you love me, did you . . ." (Vaz 44). It is the material only that Clara associates with life and love and the material becomes her sole focus.

While Helio initially does take steps toward expanding his ego, his ego is still heavily connected to the bodily and physical. Early on, each step he takes to transform Clara into an angel illustrates his desire to overcome repression: the harp he makes of strings hung through the house, ripping the roof off the house, and the tubes on which Clara practices flying. However, Helio cannot comprehend that an angel would not need these items, since they emphasize bodily presence. This emphasis is most apparent when he claims

[a]ll math, all now, would be in the service of computing how to give an angel what she needed. He could not return Clara's dead parents to her, but when he found her staring distantly, he could point her toward the completeness that angels dwelled in, and so bring her back to herself. (Vaz 43)

First, an angel should have no needs, at least not corporeal needs. Furthermore, Helio affixes Clara to the physical world. In his desire to help her realize her potential as an angel, he not only wants to bring Clara back to herself, but also back to him. Similarly, while Helio believes Clara can and should be transformed into an angel, the thought of losing her terrifies him. Despite being "almost thirty years older than Clara," Helio is "like all widowers . . . nervous that God would decide he was accustomed to anguish and could bear more" (Vaz 42). While he understands the implication of Clara's becoming an angel, he cannot turn his focus away from her physical form. Even when Clara is transforming into an angel, Helio is still focused on the bodily. He thinks "[t]his was too hard. He was not ready to lose her. His body felt as if he had been running for miles" (Vaz 53). Here, his only way of expressing his emotions is to correlate them to his own body's responses.

In this respect, Helio obsesses over his own body almost as much as Clara's. At one point, "[t]o stay young and protect her, he enrolled in a karate class but was overcome by the first lesson" (Vaz 42). Again, he tries to protect himself from losing Clara. If he keeps himself in shape, he guarantees her physical safety. Helio shows his material attachment through numerous bodily references. When he hears Clara sing, rather than equating both her and her voice to the spiritual or angelic realm as he often does, he instead describes it as Clara making "his geometry real and alive, not stuck in his

thoughts! Real and alive, and *singing*. He touched himself all over, especially the storehouse of his chest, to feel his arteries pulsating inside himself during her concerts” (Vaz 45). Helio’s use of the worlds “real” and “alive,” again, indicate his inability to relinquish the physical. His geometry is not real and alive in his thoughts or consciousness, but only when Clara transforms it into an audible manifestation. Furthermore, Helio must also transform his feelings and emotions into something corporeal, which his need to feel emotionally the power of Clara’s voice as well as his need physically to feel when he places his hands over his heart.

Mr. Porter’s paranoia over bodily harm illustrates his own repression. Balancing on the edge of a sidewalk under an overhang, he checks to see how hard it’s raining. Just then “[a] shot rang out. Mr. Porter began to thrash the air with both arms as if he were teetering on the edge of a cliff” (Millhauser 156). While the shot is actually thunder, it sends panic through him, and he loses his balance. A little while later, the red-haired woman startles him when she speaks. Instead of responding to her comment, he glances around uneasily, spotting a “solitary figure in a tan trench coat who stood with his back to Mr. Porter and clasped in pink hands a tightly furled black umbrella with a silver point” (Millhauser 156). The apprehensive way he observes the man indicates his fear of physical harm and/or death, and he transforms an unassuming stranger seeking shelter from the rain into a threat. When he does finally respond to the woman, he mumbles, “[i]t’s getting late,’ . . . in a low voice barely above a whisper, and then he pushed against the ticket booth with his shoulder and straightened up and stepped briskly away, taking a deep breath and lowering his head as he approached the loud, dark cement”

(Millhauser 156-57). Mr. Porter flees, slinking away. His paranoia also grows, for he cannot help but breathe heavily. Even the cement, an inanimate object, becomes threatening. Focusing intently, Mr. Porter places all emphasis on his physical well-being, transforming everything around him into danger.

His clothing compulsion first illustrates his attachment to the corporeal. When the rain begins, Mr. Porter's attention immediately snaps to his clothes, fearing they might be ruined.²⁸⁹ The description of his attire and the care he puts into it, "tan cotton pants, and the sleeves of his light-blue shirt were turned back neatly twice" (Millhauser 155), show the pride he takes in them as well as his fastidiousness. Soon, Mr. Porter realizes the rain is not going to die down, and that he has no option but to go out into it. Mr. Porter again frets over his clothing, for

[a]s his foot swung over the line, Mr. Porter saw dark streaks soaking into his light pant leg. By the third step he felt as if he had stepped into a bathroom shower. Only a few pale streaks remained in his shirt, dyed dark blue by the rain. . . .His shoes shone with a perfect finish but he feared the black polish was being washed away by the rubbing rain. (Millhauser 157)

His physical attachment runs so deep that he cannot even let go of the smallest details, a fact that is further highlighted through the way other characters react to the rain: Two girls standing outside the theater, "giggle" at the rain's touch "as if the storm were a wild and erotic joke" (Millhauser 155) and then plunge into it. Another woman, though completely drenched from the rain, has a similar, lackadaisical attitude, simply commenting "[n]ice weather'" (Millhauser 156). Mr. Porter, on the other hand, refuses

to go out into the storm, remaining under the overhang until everyone else has dispersed, and he has no other option.²⁹⁰ Even near the end of the story when the magnitude of his situation has dawned on him, he still focuses on his clothing. With his car stalled, Mr. Porter is forced out into the storm, and as he walks across the street, he only can concentrate on the “sucking and oozing sounds in his ruined shoes. As he steps onto the parking lot, he sees his shoe disappear into a red puddle; when he lifts his shoe, he sees the polish dripping away in red-black drops” (Millhauser 160). Essentially, Mr. Porter’s obsession with these details represses him, keeping him from actually thinking about anything unrelated to the corporeal world of which he is a part.

This obsession with mundane details carries over from his clothes to the rest of the material world. When he mistakenly enters the wrong car, Mr. Porter catalogs what is in the back seat, seeing “a lidless blue coffee can containing a screwdriver with a transparent yellow handle. Beside the can lay a little naked pink plastic doll the size of a thumb” (Millhauser 157-58). Similarly, when he finally finds his own car, we quickly learn that on the front seat lies a rain-soaked book with blue on the page ends and on the back seat is an umbrella. None of these details are of any importance, other than to Mr. Porter. These details simply feed his attachment. Despite the downpour and the poor visibility, when Mr. Porter is driving, he feels a need to catalog everything he passes, from lights to storefronts. Thus, we learn that one series of storefronts contain “a luminous green window filled with green-tinted bicycles, a blue-glowing cardboard girl holding up a bottle of beer, a red and green pizzeria” (Millhauser 158). For Mr. Porter, the unknown is unfathomable; the material world is his only reality, blocking his

exploration of anything outside himself and his own, small reality.²⁹¹ Consequently, he lets all the trivial details of the physical world consume him, feeling safety in what he knows.

As noted earlier, the repression is also tied to each character's narrow focus on the rational. Both Helio and Mr. Porter believe a logical explanation exists for everything. However, through Clara, we actually see how such ideologies are transmitted as well as how reliance on the imaginative alone can be detrimental. Clara, an imaginative, creative woman, initially does not think in the same "sensible" way as does Helio and largely excludes the logical. She does admire his logic, but in excluding it from her own life, she frequently sacrifices her own free will. For example, she lets Helio make all her decisions for her. When Helio claims she is an angel, Clara simply thinks she will "wait and see," for he is always "arranging something or fixing it" (Vaz 44). In her reliance, she comes to believe he is always correct and that logic offers all the solutions. She depends solely on Helio's wisdom, and only after his reassurance does she take any action: swimming, the night, flying—all activities she previously avoided because of her fear of death. Consequently, her reliance on Helio's logic affects her own ideology, and at this point she adopts her more existentialistic view of death, as she expresses when she wishes Helio would "stop thinking so much because it worried her it would wear him out, thinking too much cut life up into little pieces" (Vaz 45). Consequently, the less blended logic and imagination are, the more repressed Clara becomes. Once her focus shifts to the rational, she fears for Helio. Logic tells her that she only has a little time with him, and once he is gone, he simply is no more.

While Helio does possess both creative and logical tendencies, he initially relies heavily on the logical. In fact, he uses logic in his attempts to explain the unknown. He develops a whole line of mathematical equations believing they will shed light on Clara's spirit:

Line + parabola = Clara standing, then bending to put on her shoes.

))) ((($\$$ was Clara listening to a song only once, and then knowing perfectly how to sing it.

| | was Helio walking with her before they joined hands: | - |.

If | \square was Clara in front of a window, then | $\square \times 7 = x$, x being unknown, was Clara throughout a week, with her private thoughts. (Vaz 42)

Despite the fact his equations offer no insight, he persists in using rationality alone.

This focus only reinforces his repression. Concerned that he will lose Clara, "[h]is head filled every pause and empty space with geometry and formulas, as if his wishing hard enough would bring forth shapes that would amuse her and keep her his" (Vaz 42). He must find a way to keep Clara; the thought of physically losing her terrifies him because he can't help but think of death as the complete end. Later, once he begins delving into the imaginative and believes Clara to be an angel, he still can't escape the rational. He devotes hours upon hours to writing an equation that will allow her to shed her physical form.²⁹² No matter how hard he tries, he is frustrated; logic alone does not provide the answers for which he is searching.

Mr. Porter needs a rationally ordered world, otherwise he is lost. This first becomes apparent when he mistakenly gets in the wrong car after attending a movie. The car is the exact same model and color as his own—a silver, Chevy hatchback. Perplexed

when his ignition key doesn't work, Mr. Porter notices a roll of "butter-rum Lifesavers" on the seat next to him, Lifesavers that do not belong to him. This small disruption to his orderly life gives him "[t]he odd sensation that the world was unraveling, rushing out of control, as when in his childhood, descending a dark stairway, he had reached out his foot for that last, phantom stair even as the floor, one step too soon, leaped up to meet him" (Millhauser 157). The logical world Mr. Porter craves has failed him, creating panic. Furthermore, he equates this sensation to his childhood, a time when there was much in the world he didn't know or understand. The unknown creeping into his orderly world stirs the same fear and wonder he felt as a child. The logical is what makes the world stable; it is what explains both the world and existence. Thus, what we see is, not only for Mr. Porter, but also for Clara and Helio, that reliance on the rational fails. Instead, this reliance leads to further repression and fear as none of the characters are able to look outside themselves. For Clara, there is no comfort. Instead, she worries over death and fears losing Helio. For Helio, the logical offers no answers; he is incapable of completing any of his equations, for he cannot step outside his immediate reality. Mr. Porter finds his reliance on the logical actually negates the stability he desires, as everything around him blurs and changes unexpectedly.

Each character's repression and reliance on the rational also is reflected in his or her early view of water, a view which does not engage the imaginative. For Clara, Helio and Mr. Porter, dark water is all-consuming. It is the substance into which one disappears, the substance that erodes everything away. Reflecting Bachelard's comments, the characters believe it dissolves completely, leaving nothing of the person

behind. While dealt with less extensively in “Math Bending Unto Angels,” dark water does make its presence felt. Clara fears the water, refusing to go in, “because back home in the Azores her father got lost at sea” (Vaz 44). When she sees a necklace in the silt near the water, her thoughts once again turn to death. She thinks the necklace “belonged to a noblewoman who was . . . kidnapped. No, murdered, lost forever, here in this lake! Her ghost wandered . . .” (Vaz 45). Water does not offer comfort, but instead takes life. The thought of going into the water terrifies Clara, for she believes she could just as easily be lost. While Helio encourages Clara to go into the water, his own fears later betray him. He is overly anxious knowing that Clara is stuck, alone, in the rain. In this way, the rain takes on a dark tone. At this point, it obviously can do little more than make her wet. Yet, he hurries home, as if it actually will wash her away. After he knows the rain eventually will take Clara away, he refuses to start arguments with her. If he does, Helio believes “the surprise in the air would cause the terrible forces to collide. Rain would come. Torrents would cascade into their home” (Vaz 53). Even though he has accepted Clara’s imminent dissolution, it is dark water that will take her away from him, leaving nothing behind. Thus, for both, no consolation can be found in water, only death and fear. In this way, their entire idea of being is attached to the physical world, and death means their complete elimination.

Dark water is the substance that, in the end, dissolves Mr. Porter into nothingness. It is no surprise then that he fixates on it throughout “Rain.” This fixation is reflected in the way his surroundings blur uncontrollably. The blurring begins very normally, with common objects deformed in the rain. At the story’s beginning, Mr. Porter sees that the

“traffic light threw rippling green and red reflections that mingled with the blinking lemon swirls of the marquee lights” (Millhauser 156). Here, we see the normal description of an image reflected in water. Soon, however, the blurring affects his sight, and “[h]is lenses rippled. A blurred taxi floated by, flinging at him a sheet of water. . . . In the dark he took off his glasses and rubbed them against his soaked shirt. When he put them on he saw wavy blurs” (Millhauser 157). Conveyed in a normal manner, the rain simply blurring his glasses, these passages portend what is to come, and Mr. Porter’s blurred vision quickly takes on a more sinister tone. When he finally does locate his car, the blurring displacement occurs. Looking at himself in his rear bumper, “[i]n the dripping chrome he saw his image, a colored ripple, and through his streaming lenses he read his license plate” (Millhauser 158). His own blurred form indicates that his notions about the stability of the physical world have been shaken. As the dark water slowly distorts his physical being, he no longer sees himself in solid form, but rather in a rippling, waving form.

This dark water not only affects Mr. Porter, but all that is corporeal. Driving toward his home, Mr. Porter watches “the stoplights and shopfronts flowing along the street in iridescent streams. Slowly, wavering silently, the bright signs and windows floated past, dripping into the street, streaming along the gutters, pouring into drains” (Millhauser 158). Mr. Porter’s physical world is dissolving around him. Nothing, not even buildings, are solid. As he continues driving, the rain obscures and blurs his vision to the point where “[h]e could barely see. Blurred rows of aquamarine lights stretched curving into the distance, tinting the mist. Mr. Porter felt as if he were driving at the

bottom of a green swimming pool” (Millhauser 159). The more the rain blurs his vision, and the more distorted his surroundings become, the more Mr. Porter feels disassociated from the physical world. This disassociation terrifies Mr. Porter, for all he knows and believes about himself is tied to this world. By the time he reaches his exit, the signs are “melting,” and the highway is “dripping” (Millhauser 159). The buildings have virtually dissolved, and all he can see is “the long smear of the shopping center,” while their signs “stained the dark mist overhead and flowed into the gleaming tar” (Millhauser 160). The blurrier Mr. Porter’s vision becomes, the more irrational the world seems. Thus, dark water erodes his stability, threatening everything around him. Reflecting his repression, Mr. Porter does not ponder what this means about reality, but rather sees it as a threat to his own existence, an existence he does not believe continues after death.

Each character’s repression, in the end, only amplifies his or her fear. Thus, they develop an inability to see anything beyond the self, which, in turn, stifles their ability to function in the world. Clara sees and imagines death all around her, and even the simple necklace on the lake shore becomes a symbol of death. Consequently, her fear consumes her life, particularly as related to Helio; for Clara, everything, even his thoughts, poses a threat to his existence. After he is injured, she begins hearing the color purple, and it tells her “‘I am the color of grief. . . .Don’t you remember that your mother became purple with sorrow after your father drowned?. . . .Did you think that if you hid away here in California, your mother’s lamentations would never find you?’” (Vaz 47). Associating purple with death, Clara begins hearing it everywhere: in the lilacs, the lavender, the night sky. She becomes so fearful that she no longer sleeps “because the night was

purple upon purple, the color of the deepest part of the sea” (Vaz 47). Her realization that death follows her everywhere reinforces her tenuous grasp on the material world. Furthermore, she is no longer able to avoid all things that cause death, such as she did by not swimming. The color purple is an ever-present and inescapable reminder that reinforces her terror, restricting her perspective and her functionality.

For Helio, the deeper he delves into Clara’s angelicness, the more fearful he becomes. In the beginning, he obsesses over Clara’s “private” thoughts because “they seemed to carry her far away, which terrified him” (Vaz 42). Already, he cannot stand the thought of physically losing Clara. His attachment, in conjunction with his rational equations, intensifies his fears. The thought of Clara’s transformation unbearable, he abandons his work. Instead, he throws himself into the corporeal, deciding “to pursue ordinary things rather than the third set of question marks in his equation [the set that would bring about Clara’s transformation]” (Vaz 49). Even the simple act of buying t-shirts is confusing. Focusing solely on the physical, Helio becomes more and more anxious, for nothing goes as planned on his trip to the store:

his car threatened to overheat on the road, he took several wrong turns, and he was shaking by the time he found a parking space. People behind him honked as he backed out and drove forward in the space several times to align his car properly. In the men’s department, the array of shirts was bewildering. . . .When a clerk asked if he needed help, he threw down his package and ran. (Vaz 49)

Helio does not find the solace he is looking for in the material. Instead, his fears are so compounded that he cannot even perform simple tasks.

Things only get worse when he has lunch at a local diner. Taking a bow out of his mouth and placing it on a child's head, he inadvertently offends the girl's mother. At this point, his panic escalates to such an extreme that he can't even calculate the money needed for his bill. By the time he reaches his car, Helio is "quaking." Clinging to the physical world in an attempt to eliminate the unknown fails Helio, as his fear and anxiety only grows stronger. He fails to realize that the material cannot offer the answers he desires, instead leading to his near breakdown. Helio's fear culminates near the end of the story when Clara's dissolution is imminent. He realizes both the wonder and awe in the act of, but still cannot let her go. He dreads having to "go himself to what he feared the most, which was the promise of this, that she might be invisible and disappear from him" (Vaz 51).²⁹³ Thus, we again see Helio torn between two worlds: that of the unknown and that of the corporeal. While the thought of Clara's filling the water and world with her spirit brings him incredible joy, losing her fills him with terror. And this terror immobilizes him, making him second guess and hesitate over every choice he makes.

Mr. Porter's fears are exacerbated when he extends his focus from his own body to all that is physical. At the beginning of his drive home, he strains "through rippling lenses for the broken white line that marked the lane. . . .A white streak appeared; Mr. Porter was driving in the center of two lanes. Behind him a truck was flashing its lights. Mr. Porter swerved to the right" (Millhauser 159). Here, his anxiety is normal; the stress of driving through a downpour making him worry over his safety. As the rain continues, however, Mr. Porter becomes more agitated, and his fear begins eating at him. He

describes the rain as hammering “against the car top like sharp fingernails drumming against a metal table. Who will come? No one comes, no one will ever come, though the fingernails drum drum drum against the metal table” (Millhauser 159). Given that most household tables are made of wood, Mr. Porter’s metal table is more reminiscent of an autopsy room table, his horror over death leading him to this image. Additionally, his repetition of the idea that no one will come indicates just how much he fears death and the unknown. For Mr. Porter, death is it; there is nothing and no one else.

His car stuck in high water, Mr. Porter’s fear grows even stronger. Fruitlessly attempting to dislodge his car from the rising water, “[h]e waited, stepped on the gas, and waited longer; stepped on the gas, waited, stepped on the gas; waited; stepped on the gas. As he waited he noticed water seeping through the doors onto the floor. Quickly he tried again” (Millhauser 160). The quick and repetitive manner he tries to extricate his car captures his anxiety. Additionally, there is something more to his actions than simply those of a man afraid of losing his vehicle. The water is rising, and the car is irrevocably stuck. Normally, the first instinct would be for one’s own safety, rather than their vehicle’s safety. However, Mr. Porter refuses to abandon his car and wade to higher water, even when he notices the water rising. He equates his own safety with his car’s safety; if he can’t save his car, an object much larger and stronger than he, what hope exists for him? This thought is particularly evident when he finally does abandon his car, for

Mr. Porter tried to walk quickly but he seemed to be walking through a tide. He would never arrive anywhere. His shoes were ruined, his shirt was ruined, everything

was washing away. The rain was flooding him, passing through him and coming out the other side. Everything was coming undone. Black drops fell from his watchband onto his hands, blue drops fell from his shirtsleeves onto his arms. (Millhauser 161)

His functionality completely eliminated once his car is gone and his clothes are destroyed, Mr. Porter unravels. His repression overcomes him, and he has nothing left. Thus, Mr. Porter's greatest fear is realized, and he simply dissolves into nothingness.

Therefore, acting as a cultural agent, magical realism, in this case through dissolution, transforms Clara and Helio's ideology on both life and death. Prior to Clara's dissolution, both were fixated on logic and the physical world. This fixation, in turn, made them fear death as the complete end of existence, repressing their egos. Finding no comfort in the rational and material alone, they turn toward a blending of the imaginative with the logical that paves the way both for the dissolution and release. As Chappelle says, "the idea of the soul refers to reality that has to be imagined before anything can be known about it. It refers to a reality that has to be imagined *so that* something can be known about it" (3). Engaging their imaginative sides, they finally can explore the unknown and contemplate the soul in a way they could not before. Furthermore, their imagination draws them to the water, and it is this substance, in the end, into which Clara dissolves. It is through Clara's dissolution that both realize death is not the end of being, but rather the beginning. Hofstadter, writing about a snowflake's dissolution, says, "it was once very much a discernible subsystem of the universe, now dissolves into the large system which once held it. Though it is no longer present as a distinct subsystem, its essence is somehow still present, and will remain so" (255).²⁹⁴

Clara and Helio, as we have seen, come to understand that the essence always remains, even after death. Clara is now a part of the universe and will go on living despite the loss of her body. Finally comprehending what Clara's dissolution means, Helio knows that even if he has to wait for "weeks and months and entire California seasons between rainfalls" (Vaz 54), Clara will always return, always be present. Furthermore, the dissolution also expands their egos, allowing them to become active participants in the world around them and opening their eyes to new possibilities. In this way, both Clara and Helio are liberated; freed from mental and physical confines, their fears are eradicated.

Unlike Clara's dissolution, Mr. Porter's does not lead to his liberation and happiness. Relying solely on logic, Mr. Porter cannot relinquish his attachment to the physical world and his becomes repressed. Stifling his imagination, he is unable to envisage anything more than the corporeal. For Mr. Porter, everything is explainable, rational and orderly in this world, something which he depends on. Consequently, when the rain begins blurring and twisting everything around him, his worldview is shaken; he knows what to expect of this world, and he expects stability. Yet, in denying his imagination, he is not able to adapt to the unexpected and unknown. Instead, he clings more desperately to the material, and his fears only intensify. Believing that once body is gone, nothing more remains, Mr. Porter cannot abandon the rational and physical, even when both fail him. Once he dissolves, therefore, he simply washes away with the rain into nothingness. While Mr. Porter's dissolution does not pave the way for his own ideological transformation, it does pinpoint the foolishness of his view. Mr. Porter's

ideology offers no comfort and only leads to fear. Incorporating the imaginative, on the other hand, leads to liberation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in each of the chapters, magical realism's magic acts as a cultural agent, stepping in where societal influence is lacking and/or negative. For example, magical realism intervenes in *The Breast* when Kepesh is unable to mitigate or find any proper societal examples of gender—its true construction, “roles,” and even identity. This function of the style is observed time and again across the chapters, and frequently the magical physically transforms characters to bring about change. No matter whether magical realism enacts bodily metamorphosis or not, it forces the characters to truly think about the issues they face: gender, oppression, racial inequalities, and even death. In doing so, the narrative device transforms characters ideologies. Additionally, the style effects changes in characters identities, and these shifts in each character's perception of the self, in conjunction with the shift in their views, empowers him or her.

Important to our understanding is each author's style. What we find is that magical realism and the magical in these (and many other) U.S. magical realist texts serves a cultural purpose. Thus, the different cultural issues each author highlights determines their style and the way magical realism is drawn into the text. For example, looking at Roth, Carter, and Rice, none shy away from explicitly sexual language as they

delve into gender issues. However, the language varies widely. Roth is more likely to use “proper” terms for sexual acts such as “fellatio” and “cunnilingus.” His less descriptive, more masculine language when it comes to sexual terms reflects the masculine power over language—a been there, done that tone, in a way, that illustrates he can selectively choose which words to use. Carter, on the other hand, is more likely to infuse her writing with very bawdy terms and more explicitly sexual depictions. In fact, some refer to Carter’s writing as pornographic. She utilizes graphic language and sexual depictions for several reasons. First, there is a shock value—this is a masculine vernacular not “appropriate” from a woman. Second, she claims a voice for women, a voice she believes can and should have just as much power as the male voice. Rice has a no holds barred approach, rampantly filling his pages with sexual terms such as “cunt” and “cock.” Wanting to erase gender boundaries, Rice’s style and language show that there is nothing taboo about the body.

Additionally, each author’s style takes on the tone of the cultural issues their main character’s address. Frequently, the language is colloquial and cultural dialects (as in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer*) are employed to reflect the particular heritage, and even age and mentality of the character. The language also draws on cultural terminology, traditions, and heritage. Drawing from *Beloved*, we see words such as Schoolteacher and whiteman. The capitalization of the former and the way both are strung together in one words reflects the history and power issues at play in the novel. Similarly, Power includes a wide variety of words and stories that reflect the Dakota heritage as well as their own struggles with the dominant whites. In fact, there is

such a desire to preserve this culture and insulate it from the white world that when a white school teacher asks the children for Dakota stories, they all lie and make them up, fearing what another white person would do with their heritage.

Consequently, the magical is also drawn into each text differently, based on the cultural issues each work examines and each author's and text's cultural traditions. For example, both Roth and Nordan revolve their texts around one, primary magical event: Kepesh's transformation into a breast in *The Breast*, and Bobo's transformation into a loa in *Wolf Whistle*. These main, magical events foreground the two authors' primary purposes—an examination of gender issues and an examination of racial issues. Other authors, also utilize one primary magical instance, but also draw from many smaller magical events that also highlight their overarching purpose. Examples of this are seen in Hoffman's *The River King* and Power's *The Grass Dancer*. In addition to Hoffman's primary magic, Gus's ghost, we are also given several other magical events, including the story of the first Haddan School President's wife, a woman whom he neglected and cheated on. She eventually hung herself in the girls' dormitory, and ever since, the roses she planted outside the dorm give off an unnaturally strong odor whenever they bloom. Again, Hoffman uses this early on in the novel to highlight the class issues (the wife one of the lower class townspeople and the President from an upper class family) that later plague Carlin. Power's novel is infused with magical events: Mercury's magic, the vision quests the men go on, and stories of the Dakota ancestress Red Dress. All of these elements work together, highlighting the importance of Native American community and heritage.

Taken together, what we see across these magical realist works is an emphasis on culture and cultural issues. We see the exploration of a particular culture from a person inside that culture. As noted in the introduction, coming from this perspective, the culture is not exoticized, but rather written about in a matter-of-fact manner. This perspective, then, forces the reader to abandon any preconceived notions and explore the culture through the author's words. While this can be true of any cultural or ethnic work, it is the magical realism that differentiates the texts. Magical realism is a vital component of this process, for it captures certain cultural traditions, beliefs, and issues. Since the magical is not expected, it defamiliarizes both characters and readers who encounter it. Suddenly, the cultural issues they believed they understood are presented in a different light. Whereas before the magical intervention, both characters and readers were often "set" in their understanding of an issue, the magical now helps them approach and see different sides of the issue—in essence, it gives both characters and readers the chance to open their minds and positively change their views.

This cultural process is evident across the chapters, particularly if we look at the ideological transformations that occur. Time and again, we see characters challenging cultural ideologies that are oppressive or repressive as they encounter the magical. For instance, in Chapter Two, Kepesh, Eve, and Doug all challenge, in differing amounts and ways, "traditional" gender concepts and their inherent power issues. Chapter One illustrates how Alice and Toni reconceptualize ideas of the Other. Thus, the characters we have examined often reject these dominant and negative ideologies, replacing them with a more positive world view based on their own experiences with the magical.

In all cases, however, characters more generally alter their world views—beliefs that give the characters’ lives a framework. For instance, in “Math Bending Unto Angels,” Helio fears death, leading to an unhealthy attachment to all that is physical, repression of ego, and exacerbated fears. It is not until he transforms his views of death and the unknown that he is finally liberated. *The River King’s* Carlin holds the belief that she must reject those around her before they reject her. Only when Gus’s ghost intervenes can she let go of these views, finding acceptance and a place in both communities (her poorer, Floridian hometown and the richer, New England Haddan School) in which she had previously felt herself to be an outsider. Thus, magical realism, through the magical’s cultural agency, helps characters navigate these more negative and detrimental world views, positively transforming characters’ beliefs.

Magical realism is particularly well-suited for addressing ideological issues, both for characters in the works and readers alike. First, commenting on ethnic American authors Amy Tan’s and Louise Erdrich’s use of the style, Magdalena Delicka says,

[u]sing the juxtaposition of two different epistemological systems in magical realism, Erdrich and Tan project their ideological concerns with the socio-cultural and political borders of ethnic communities in the US, such as English/Non-English, whites/colored, Christian/Non-Christian. (26)

However, as illustrated in each of the chapters, it is not just ethnic American authors who employ the style as a challenge to ideology, but white U.S. authors such as Alice Hoffman, Stephen Millhauser, and Doug Rice. Furthermore, Steffen Hantke notes how authors Tim O’Brien, Lucius Shepard, and Jack Cady utilize the narrative device in their

fiction centering on the Vietnam War. As Hantke posits, this fiction “shows the potential to break out of the rigid Western tradition of philosophical binarisms and engage instead in a kind of Bakhtinian dialogism that lends itself to genuine and often far-reaching ideological critique” (271). And this is exactly what many U.S. magical realist works do for both characters and readers. As Suzanne Baker says in “Binarism and Duality: Magical Realism and Postcolonialism,” “[m]agic realism . . . [opens] up a ‘dual spaciality,’ thus making problematic any notion of a single unified world-view or reality” (89).²⁹⁵ This dual spaciality, the magical and the realistic, defamiliarizes both characters and readers.²⁹⁶ Rather than a barrage of overused images and words related to a particular idea or issue, the magical in magical realism gives readers and characters something out of the ordinary (extraordinary, it might be said) and unexpected. This, in turn, causes both character and reader to reapproach the subject at hand from a fresh perspective and reassess and alter previous views. Corroborating this function, Baker says in “Magic Realism as a Postcolonial Strategy: *The Kadaitcha Sung*” that in blurring the distinction between “myth and reality . . . magic realism attempts to shake the sense of the normal or rational, opening the way for the reader [and character] to question what has previously been accepted as ‘real,’ and therefore ‘true’” (57).²⁹⁷ Repeatedly, we have seen magical realism serving this purpose, have watched it force characters to reassess and change previous views, and, probably, we, as readers, have been challenged ourselves to, if not change, at least reappraise our own beliefs.

Second, ideologically transformed characters then turn inward, reexamining the self. In this fashion, magical realism also results in characters positively reassessing and

reforming their own identities. As stated earlier, a lack of and/or negative cultural influence negatively impacted ideology. This same negative impact also occurs with characters own identities. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah,

[a]n identity is always articulated through concepts (and practices) made available to you be religion, society, school, and state, mediated by family, peers, friends. It follows that the self whose choices liberalism celebrates is not a presocial think—not some authentic inner essence independent of the human world into which we have grown—but rather the product of our interaction from our earliest years with others. (20)²⁹⁸

Time and again, what we see is that negative cultural/social feedback and/or interactions also harm the characters view of their own identities. In *Beloved*, Denver has no positive, social feedback. Thus, she retreats into herself. Isolated, she develops the view that she has no self worth. Similarly, *Mockingbird's* Toni bases her identity on false premises about her mother. Because of this, she represses everything in herself that she believes to be like her mother. In doing so, she loses sight of who she really is, and, when things go wrong with this self-created identity (she loses her white collar job), Toni becomes paralyzed, unable even to search for a new job.

This lack of or pessimistic social feedback is critical in each worth, for without this feedback, or at least without positive feedback, characters cannot properly shape their own identities. As Appiah says,

[i]n constructing an identity, one draws, among other things, on the kinds of persons available in one's society. Of course, there is not just one way that gay or straight people or blacks or whites or men or women are to behave, but there are ideas around .

. . about how gay, straight, black, white, male, or female people ought to conduct themselves. These notions provide the loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping our plans of life. Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories. . . .For modern people, the narrative form entails seeing one's life as having a certain arc, as making sense through a life story that expresses who one is through one's own project of self-making. The narrative arc is yet another way in which an individual's life depends deeply on something socially created and transmitted. (21-22, 23)

I quote Appiah at length here for he raises two important issues about identity. First, that individuals draw on social models, whether those models are sexual, racial, or gender-related, in order to shape their identities. Second, in drawing from those models, they create a particular narrative about their own identity, a narrative that also shapes their lives and actions. As the chapters illustrate, including the above examples, characters do not have the appropriate social models on which to base their identities. In some cases, these models are missing; in others, the characters reject the model(s), but in all instances, they try to fashion their own sense of self from this lack and/or rejection. What happens is that they come to see a lack within themselves, something missing that makes them self-deprecating. This is reflected in their various actions and in the way they lead their lives. Rather than developing a positive, narrative arc through identity, they instead unassuredly and pessimistically flounder about until, frequently, they are unable even to make the simplest decisions for themselves.

It is only when the magical realism mediates that characters finally can positively reconsider and reform their concepts of self. In this way, the magical, again, acts as a cultural agent. Continuing with my earlier examples, it is only when the magical

intercedes that Denver is finally empowered, stepping out into the community for the first time on her own and finding value in herself. For Toni, the ideological and self transformation are intertwined. With magical realism's aide, Toni reevaluates her view of the Other. It is at this point that she also realizes that her mother is an important part of herself, and in embracing those qualities in herself, Toni is empowered, working toward a secure future for both herself and her daughter. What we see happening in these magical realist works, then, is that the narrative device functions culturally, taking the place of the missing or negative societal influence impacting each character.

Furthermore, as Appiah says, "[o]ne thing identity provides is another source of value, one that helps us make our way among those options. To adopt an identity, to make it mine, is to see it as structuring my way through life" (24). Through magical realism's mediation, characters across the works I have discussed are able to positively remodel their own identities, which, in turn, empowers them as they go through life.

Finally, magical realism's focus on identity has long been noted. Wendy B. Faris posits that many

magically real bodies . . . are literally inscribed with their social, political, cultural, and geographical coordinates. . . . We might not at this point that these questions regarding embodiment are a particular variation on the idea that magical realist texts often question our notions of spatiality and identity. (188, 190)

Faris's notion of embodiment is particularly striking in the chapters where characters undergo a physical as well as mental transformation. These metamorphoses indicate the changes in identity, as well as ideology, that must occur, as in *The Breast* where Kepesh

must come to terms with his new identity, and in the process, renegotiate his concepts of gender identity. It is not only the texts where corporeal metamorphosis transpires, though, where characters navigate concepts of the self, as we have seen. Part of the reason for this change in identity, according to Faris, is that, often, characters are more open to the magical (the “object of knowledge”) transforming them. As each chapter has highlighted, magical realism introduces this new knowledge to the characters, and as they think and analyze it, they become open to altering ideology, which then revises identity. Thus, as Faris notes, “magically real images . . . share in that revisionist agenda” (193). Finally, we have also seen what happens to characters stuck inside themselves—the negative self image they form. In this fashion, magical realism, like postmodernism, according to Louis Parkinson Zamora, recuperates “the premodern conceptions of subjectivity. They [both the style and authors] refuse to remain locked into modern categories of individual psychology, insisting instead that the self is actualized by participating in communal and cosmic categories” (140).²⁹⁹ Here, Zamora echoes Appiah’s ideas about identity, and as discussed earlier, magical realism directs characters outside the self toward the social needed to positively reshape identity.

Through magical realism’s transformative power, the style foregrounds ideological and identity related issues. Shown in each chapter, characters encountering the magical undergo radical restructuring in both categories. The narrative device, through its magic, forces them out of their narrow and restricted views. As they encounter and contemplate what is beyond the self, they then grapple with new ideas and perceptions. In the end, they take in these new knowledges and beliefs, coming out

stronger and more capable than before. Furthermore, the implications of these metamorphoses are far broader. First, there is the fact that the reader also is taken on the same journey as the character. Therefore, the reader is given the same opportunity for change as the character. And, magical realism aids in this process. As Jon Thiem says, since the magical “emerges from the interpenetration of irreconcilable worlds,” which “violates our usual sense of what is possible, then “[t]extualization is arguably the paradigmatic topos of magical realism because of the way in which it showcases this mystifying phenomenon,” drawing the reader into the text in the process (244). Second, these magical realist works regularly end with hope for the future, for changed and empowered, characters also have the ability to effect those whom they encounter, to positively change and empower others. Thus, these magical realism inspired metamorphoses ripple out from character to community and possibly farther.

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NOTES

Chapter I: Introduction

¹ Carpentier claimed this style even earlier in his famous essay, "On the Marvelous Real in America," writing, "I found the marvelous real in every turn. Furthermore, I thought, the presence and vitality of this marvelous real was not the unique privilege of Haiti but the heritage of all of America where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies. . . . Focusing on another aspect of this theme, we can see that whereas in Western Europe folk dancing, for example, has lost all of its magical evocative power, it is hard to find a collective dance in America that does not embody a deep ritual sense and thus create around it a whole process of initiation: such as the dances of Cuban *santería* or the prodigious African version of the Corpus festival, which is still to be seen in a town called San Francisco de Yare in Venezuela" ("Marvelous" 87). Though stating it is found in America, Carpentier, given the areas he notes, is referring to Central and South America only.

² Carpentier, in "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," and Stephen Slemon's article "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse" both talk briefly about the Latin American "boom."

³ Leal considered both authors as belonging to the fantastic tradition, not magical realism.

⁴ Leal goes on to cite Roh's definition of magical realism to justify the distinctions between the two styles.

⁵ Amaryll Chanady's article "The Territorialization of the Imagery in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms," Scott Simpkins "Sources of Magic Realism/ Supplements to Realism in Contemporary Latin American Literature," P. Gabrielle Foreman's "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call," John Erickson's "Metoikoi and Magical Realism in the Maghrebian Narratives of Tahar ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi," and Greer Watson's "Assumptions of Reality: Low Fantasy, Magical Realism, and the Fantastic" all discuss, to varying degrees, the distinctions between magical realism and fantasy.

⁶ When speaking of U.S. ethnic magical realism, critics do fluctuate between terming the writing as from the marginalized to terming it as postcolonial. For example, Faris states of Toni Morrison, "the common concerns and techniques that unite Morrison with other magical realist writers, together with her assertion that her use of 'enchantment' reflects her minority cultural traditions, suggest that magical realism is an enabling strategy for diverse postcolonial traditions" (*Ordinary* 179). Shannin Schroeder, on the other hand, states that "The magical realism of North America also frequently manifests itself as an extension of the marginalized, the 'other' of Western culture and society" (48).

⁷ As does Schroeder in her article "Who'll Buy These Magic Beans? The North American Magical Realist Experience." Schroeder makes the same links between North American magical realists in seeing postcolonial elements and text emanating from "marginalized" peoples.

⁸ Suzanne Baker's "Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Strategy: The Kadaitcha Sung," Stephen Slemon's "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," and Phil McCluskey's "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the Outback: Contextualizing a Structural Magic Realism" all look specifically at magical realism as a postcolonial tool. Many articles dealing with specific texts; such as P. Gabrielle Foreman's "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call" David Mikics' "Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and the Caribbean Writer," and Roland Walter's "Pan-American (Re)Visions: Magical Realism and Amerindian Cultures in Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer*, Gioconda Belli's *La Mujer Habitada*, Linda Hogan's *Power*, and Mario Vargas Llosa's *El Hablador*"; deal with postcolonial attributes within the works they discuss.

⁹ Faris's recent work is *Ordinary Enchantment: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* and Aldama's is *Magicorealism in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi*.

¹⁰ Faris's article "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," along with David Danow in *The Spirit of the Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* and Erik Camayd-Freixas in

“Magical Realism as Primitivism: An Alternate Verisimilitude,” are just a few of the critics who look at the role of mythology and folklore in magical realist texts.

¹¹ There are numerous magical realist works by white authors, including Alice Hoffman’s *The River King*, Sean Stewart’s *Mockingbird* and *Galveston*, Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote: Which was a Dream*, Andrei Codrescu’s *Messiah*, Philip Roth’s *The Breast*, and Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*.

¹² Delbaere-Garant’s solution in her article “Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English” is to organize magical realism into three subcategories based on thematics: psychic realism, mythic realism, and grotesque realism.

¹³ While there may be more who discuss this, I only found two among the magical realist criticism at which I looked.

¹⁴ D’haen discusses this in his article “Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers.” According to D’haen, it was not until the 80s that the terms magical realism and postmodernism “allowed for spillage into other linguistic or geographic areas” (193).

¹⁵ While she does not go into extensive detail on this subject, see her article for more.

¹⁶ For example, Melissa Stewart’s article “Roads of ‘Exquisite Mysterious Muck’: The Magical Journey through the City in William Kennedy’s *Ironweed*, John Cheever’s ‘The Enormous Radio,’ and Donald Barthelme’s ‘City Life,’ the only one in the anthology *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* dealing with white, U.S. authors, does not mention the issue.

¹⁷ Susan J. Napier also addresses magical realism’s universality, stating that Japanese author Murakami Haruki’s “use of the fantastic brings a fresh perspective to many of the problems of urban modernity, most of which are not restricted to Japan. It is perhaps not surprising that his works are popular in the United States as well. The surreal and absurd world of Murakami’s characters is a universal one, suggesting that problems of identity for contemporary Japan are ones shared throughout the modern world” (473). Faris notes in “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction,” “That the genre has been extending—often via novels—into film, including mainstream American film (*The Witches of Eastwick*, *Ironweed*, *Field of Dreams*, *Ghost*) confirms my sense of this accessibility” (163).

¹⁸ Despite noting magical realism’s evolution, Hart primarily deals with postcolonial attributes in Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*.

¹⁹ Among those referring to *Beloved*, and, more generally, Morrison’s oeuvre, as postmodernist are critics Brian McHale in *Constructing Postmodernism* and Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

²⁰ D’haen talks more of this in his article.

²¹ Here, I am using the term Postmodernism to refer, more generally, to the ideologies and literatures produced during this time period. Other references to Postmodernism refer to the particular literary form.

²² For example, Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, categorized as science fiction, also contains magical realism in that certain characters have what is termed “prescience,” which gives them special abilities not known to occur within the real world. The main character, Paul Atreides, is blinded, but still has the ability to “see.”

²³ DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* contains two such magical realist elements. The first occurs when Eric is riding through town in his limo. He looks at a giant T.V. screen outside the car and sees himself “recoil in shock” on the screen before he actually does so (DeLillo 93-94). The second occurs near the end of the novel when Eric watches an unknown dead body transported to a morgue, then realizes it is his own dead body and thinks “O shit I’m dead” (DeLillo 206).

²⁴ Both Wendy B. Faris in “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction” and Theo L. D’haen in “Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers” examine the relationship between magical realism and Postmodernism.

²⁵ See Faris’s article for more detailed information on each of these characteristics.

²⁶ While the magical’s function is an important element, the discussion of its uses is far too lengthy and varied to go into too deeply here. One basic premise is that the magical presents ordinary, common things in an unusual manner, thus defamiliarizing readers. This allows readers to look at the familiar in a new light. Another basic premise is that realism is far too limiting, and magical realism actually presents a truer reality. For more on these premises, see Scott Simpkin’s article “Sources of Magic Realism/Supplements to ‘Realism in Contemporary Latin American Literature.’”

²⁷ According to McHale, Postmodern fiction is ontological, which means it “is preoccupied with questions such as: what is a world? How is a world constituted? Are there alternative worlds, and if so, how are they constituted? How do different worlds, and different kinds of world, differ, and what happens when one passes from one world to another?” (247).

²⁸ While he does not mention magical realism, when he speaks of ontological “rifts,” the works he holds up as examples are magical realist.

²⁹ See Faris’s article for more information.

³⁰ In this sense, I am using the term to refer, generally, to U.S. culture, not a particular culture or ethnic group.

³¹ While Blair explores the status of social workers as cultural agents in his article, his analysis also fits here.

³² In fact, Lois Parkinson Zamora notes that “magical realism’s most basic concern” is “the nature and limits of the knowable” (119).

³³ David K. Danow’s work *The Spirit of the Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* and Floyd Merrell’s article “The Ideal World in Search of its Reference: An Inquiry into the Underlying Nature of Magical Realism” also both address the relationship between magical realism and the unknown, as well as how they relate to modern society.

³⁴ The figures and historic events the woman mentioned included cotton gin inventor Eli Whitney, Girl Scouts of America founder Juliette Gordon Low, the 1736 founding of America’s first Sunday School in Savannah, and many more (40).

³⁵ Just a few of the characters he encounters include the Lady Chablis, a transvestite drag queen, Luther Drigger, who literally flies on strings and threatens to poison the town’s water supply with a bottle of poison he carries, and William Simon Glover who walks the invisible dog Patrick.

³⁶ Minerva and her rituals appear repeated through the second half of the book, and each time Berendt relates her practices in a reverential tone: cursing members of the court (281), the ceremony to quiet Hansford’s spirit (284-85), and the ceremony to keep the one juror on Williams’ side during his fourth trial (361-64), just to name a few. Even the book’s title comes from Minerva’s words, and as she tells Williams and Berendt, “‘Okay. Now, you know how dead time works. Dead time lasts for one hour—from half an hour before midnight to half an hour after midnight. The half hour before midnight is for doin’ good. The half hour after midnight is for doin’ evil. . . . We goin’ to the flower garden [Minerva’s term for a cemetery]’” (247).

³⁷ While Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*, is not a U.S. text, I will draw on it for comparative purposes, as there are so few magical realist works, U.S. or otherwise, where men transform into women (interestingly enough, the opposite is true for women transforming into men).

Chapter II: White Voodoo? Magic, Religion, and race in Alejo Carpentier, Lewis Nordan, and Sean Stewart

³⁸ Passage taken from the closing of Herts’s *Depreciations* (170-171).

³⁹ For more on this, see Bhabha’s work *The Location of Culture*.

⁴⁰ As James Harbeck says, “[t]hose parts of the self that are deemed unacceptable to the ego, for reasons of culture, personal history, or religion, are repressed into the unconscious and, as a result, are subject to being *projected* onto others: the external Other becomes a substitute for an unacknowledged internal Other. . . . Fear, hatred, or contempt of the Other *without* arises from fear of the Other *within*” (13, 14).

⁴¹ Steven G. Yas corroborates Bhabha’s view, defining hybridity as “a potential site or mode of resistance against the dominating forces of capital and power” (359).

⁴² Aizenberg suggests the application of the term supracolonialism for contemporary studies. For more on this, see her article “‘I Walked with a Zombie’: The Pleasures and Perils of Postcolonial Hybridity.”

⁴³ Easthope believes “Bhabha’s account of hybridity can be understood as an adversarial definition; that is, it is very clear what hybridity is defined against, what is non hybridic” (342). However, Easthope does not believe that hybridity needs to be adversarial, but rather can be any person’s embracing of multiple ethnic traditions, beliefs, etc.

⁴⁴ At times, future change is hinted at but not shown in the texts.

⁴⁵ Schroeder's article "Who'll Buy These Magic Beans? The North American Magical Realist Experience" examines this idea in more depth.

⁴⁶ The "Boom" she refers to is the explosion of Latin American magical realist texts in the 1960s.

⁴⁷ See Mohammed's article "The Sign of the Loa" for more information on this subject.

⁴⁸ As James Irish says generally of magical realism, "[i]t now opens up new possibilities for the imagination and new dimensions of consciousness for the exploration of mysterious connections – historical and cultural" (135).

⁴⁹ For more on this, see Harbeck's article.

⁵⁰ Even William Willeford says that religion "often exhibits tendencies to become increasingly magical" (340).

⁵¹ There is also a supreme *loa*, responsible for the world's creation, called Gran Met.

⁵² Depending on the area, *loa* is sometimes spelled *lwa*, the same way it is pronounced.

⁵³ There are also variations, based on location, in the *loa*'s number and roles, as well as in Voodoo practices. While Haitian and New Orleans Voodoo are very similar, there are minor differences. For example, New Orleans Voodoo has several more *loa* than Haitian Voodoo. Once Voodoo spread out in America, numerous differentiations occurred, particularly when combined with southern black conjurer beliefs. These beliefs often established magical abilities in conjurers or root doctors who could make potions, spells, and charms. When these beliefs mixed with Voodoo beliefs, they often became known as hoodoo. Newbell Puckett's early 1900s work, *Folk Beliefs in the Southern Negro*, gives an extensive account of the different beliefs and practices the African American population upheld around the turn of the 20th century. Sallie Ann Glassman's *Vodou Visions* gives a contemporary background on basic Voodoo principles and practices and on each of the New Orleans Voodoo *loa*. Alfred Mètraux's delves into Haitian Voodoo in *Voodoo in Haiti*.

⁵⁴ Long says that "Vodou is primarily based on the religion of the Fon people. . . . [while] Santería originated with the Yoruba" (18). The religion that evolved into Vodou is found in Haiti, while Santería, which combines the Voodoo religion with Catholicism, is found in Cuba. Long gives a more comprehensive account of the peoples bringing Voodoo and Santería to Santo Domingo and Cuba in her chapter "African-Based Religions in the Latin-Catholic Colonies."

⁵⁵ Long's chapters "New Orleans Voodoo" and "Conjure, Hoodoo, and Rootwork in the Anglo-Protestant South" expand on the migration and variation of Voodoo practices.

⁵⁶ Hoodoo is the name for the magical practices resulting from a mixture of a wide variety of African folkloric practices, including Voodoo, Native American botany, and even European folklore. Practitioners are frequently called hoodoo doctors or conjurers.

⁵⁷ Glassman's botánica Island of Salvation store is located in New Orleans.

⁵⁸ The rest of the breakdown in store ownership is as follows: Puerto Ricans own seven, African Americans own seven, Cubans own five, Mexican Americans and Dominicans each own four, Haitians and Native Americans each own two, and Brazilians, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans each own one store.

⁵⁹ According to Tommaso Scarano, each "had his own dictator to describe . . . each had his own literary project to accomplish and had discovered a fundamental aspect of American reality which had formerly been ignored, his own hidden face of American culture" (10).

⁶⁰ This turn to African art for inspiration was common among modernist artists and writers.

⁶¹ As Graciela Limón notes in "Haitian gods, African Roots: Identity and Freedom in Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*," "Carpentier bases his novel on the belief that the slave insurrection was a triumph of African spirituality over the European mentality" (200). Similarly, Maria-Elena Angulo writes that "[i]n all three cycles, voodoo faith, which gives the slaves hope, unity and incredible courage, is in juxtaposition to European values (presented as negative)" (22). Angulo also details how characters such as Henri Christophe are punished for forsaking voodoo and their heritage. See her chapter "Two Canonical Novels of *Realismo maravilloso*."

⁶² Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert asserts that "[a]s 'historian,' Carpentier has 'emplotted' *The Kingdom of This World* as a collage. . . . [where] fragments of history, presented as cycles of failed attempts at true freedom . . . are canvassed in a relatively short novel, and by necessity open a number of interstices that leave vital aspects of the tale in shadows" (119).

⁶³ Aldama writes more about this in his chapter “Rereading the Magical Realist Debate.”

⁶⁴ Similarly, Scarano writes, “I tend to think that among the elements that make up the *real maravilloso* as defined by Carpentier are also those we generally call by the name *realismo mágico*, which is a far richer, more complex mode of narration” (19).

⁶⁵ Paravisini-Gebert writes more about the problematics of the historical versus Carpentier’s depiction of Pauline Bonaparte in her article “The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: The Re-Reading of Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*.”

⁶⁶ As Carpentier writes, “Leclerc’s agony, heightening her fear, drove her still farther toward the world of the powers called up by the spells of Soliman” (99).

⁶⁷ Willeford believes that “magic can be said to be concerned with issues of emotional import and to engage and reflect primitive levels of the human personal. . . . [and it often involves] actions intended to induce some animating powers to a narrowly preconceived end” (344).

⁶⁸ Numerous passages highlight Pauline’s rampant sexuality. While on the island, Pauline often “consoled herself with the youthful ardor of some handsome officer” (Carpentier 95). On the ship taking Pauline and Leclerc to Haiti, she delights in the male crewmembers’ and passengers’ desire for her, playing with this attention. Knowing they were dreaming of her each night, Pauline feigns “meditations each morning . . . letting the wind ruffle her hair and play with her clothes, revealing the superb grace of her breasts” (Carpentier 91-92). Pauline is completely comfortable both in the company of so many men and with her sexuality. In fact, she soon takes to sleeping naked and bathing on the deck, providing a show for the men. Settling into the island mansion, she orders a pool dug so she can bathe naked. She then calls on Soliman as masseuse. While Soliman bathes her, Pauline takes “perverse pleasure in grazing his flanks with her body under water” (Carpentier 95).

⁶⁹ This typical view is particularly evident in Newbell Puckett’s text.

⁷⁰ As Carpentier writes, La Tortue “with its parched earth, its reddish cliffs, its wastes of cactus and locusts, its ever-present sea, seemed now her native island” (98).

⁷¹ Even contemporary French society still upholds these views. As Peter Ross Range says, “in the popular French mind Corsicans remain the hillbillies of France, the untamed wild people of an impenetrable island who are part Italian, part mafioso, part lazy. Sometimes this prejudice takes humorous forms both sides can live with. Three years ago a comic book called *L’Enquête Corse (The Corsican Investigation)* became a huge best-seller. . . . It was the mock story of stumblebum French cops chasing down stumblebum Corsican clandestines. The tale’s repeated refrain was ‘Boum!’—the sound of bombs going off in the night, a code word for life in Corsica. The book was a hit with both Corsicans and mainlanders but reinforced the exaggerated image of Corsica as all violence, no life” (65).

⁷² Pauline’s view is particularly evident through the importance she places on Soliman, who becomes. Indeed, to Pauline, Soliman becomes “[t]he only possible defender against the plague . . . the only doctor among the useless prescriptors” (Carpentier 99).

⁷³ Michael Bell’s chapter, “Living with myth” (182-198) and Barbara Webb’s chapter, “The Folk Imagination and History” both examine this failure on the part of the plantation owners. Tommaso Scarano’s article “Notes on Spanish-American Magical Realism” and Graciela Limón’s article “Haitian Gods, African Roots: Identity and Freedom in Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*.” also look at this issue.

⁷⁴ Santo Domingo’s revolution began in 1791 with the slave uprisings and led the creation and independence of Haiti in 1804. Peter Winn outlines both Haitian race relations and the centuries of political upheaval in Haitian in his chapter titled “A Question of Color” (270-306). A *hougan* is a Voodoo priest.

⁷⁵ In the work, the French plantation owners’ negatively differentiate the black race from themselves, viewing blacks as inferior, primitive, and even animalistic. Their Othered status is particularly evident when Macandal escapes. His owner decides not to go after him because “[i]t would have been foolish to run the risk of losing a couple of good mastiffs whom Macandal might have tried to silence with his machete” (Carpentier 27). Here, the colonist places a higher value on his dogs than he does on a black man. Given the colonist’s views, it is also not surprising that he treats him worse than his dogs. In fact,

when Macandal is recaptured, the man plans to torture him “in front of the others to teach them a lesson” (Carpentier 27). As the Other, the colonists set a hierarchical order, in which the slaves are below even their dogs. As, Daniel T. Sciarra and George V. Gushue note that this attitude in white people, even today, leads to “a rigidly held . . . set of beliefs about racial hierarchy that assure them a privileged place in the social order” (479).

⁷⁶ As Carpentier notes in his groundbreaking magical realist article “The Marvelous Real in America,” “the phenomenon of the marvelous presupposes faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with the miracles of saints” (86).

⁷⁷ Bouckman, a Jamaican slave, and his followers went to the forest of Bois Caiman in 1791 where they organized the rebellion/revolution. According to Webb, within six weeks of the rebellion’s start, nearly all the plantations were burned to the ground. Later, Bouckman was captured and beheaded on the same spot as Macandal (Webb 32).

⁷⁸ Not that her life on La Tortue wasn’t privileged, however, she acclimates herself to the island in a way none of the other French colonists can.

⁷⁹ According to Sallie Ann Glassman, Papa Legba is “the guardian of the crossroads, Legba opens the door that divides the spiritual and physical worlds. . . . Call on Legba when you need guidance for an important decision, when you are about to set out on a journey, or when you need to improve communication, especially with Spirit” (138-139).

⁸⁰ In fact, Nordan says, “[y]ou know, ‘I’m just an old white trash boy’” (qtd. in Bjerre 374). His nonfiction work, *Boy with Loaded Gun: A Memoir*, chronicles his life growing up poor during this turbulent time period, the struggles, odd jobs (clerk, night watchman), and ensuing alcoholism that forged his writing career.

⁸¹ Called Balance Due or “Scumtown,” this is another misguided class fieldtrip, this time visiting a classmate who was severely burned and bedridden.

⁸² As Eudora Welty describes them in “Livvie,” “bottle trees kept evil spirits from coming into the house—by luring them inside the colored bottles, where they cannot get out again” (229).

⁸³ Interestingly, no black Voodoo women appear in the story. Nordan does make one more reference to a “hoodoo woman name of Lily” (Nordan 25), but she neither makes a physical appearance in the story, nor has a race associated with her.

⁸⁴ Lasirèn is the Voodoo “goddess” of water.

⁸⁵ As Nordan describes, Bobo sees “a beautiful creature of some kind, a mermaid maybe, as she rose up from the water, her breasts bare, and combing her long hair with a comb the color of bone, and holding in the other hand a mirror as dark and fathomless as the mirror-surface of Roebuck Lake, and Bobo knew that this mermaid was himself” (178).

⁸⁶ Métraux deals with *loas* and dream visits in his subsection “Dreams” in the chapter entitled “The Supernatural World.”

⁸⁷ In the dream, “Sugar stood at the end of a short pier, and Bobo became a mermaid, a bare-breasted creature combing her hair with a comb the color of bone” (Nordan 183).

⁸⁸ As Nordan writes, “[h]is song—it must have been the magical music of his voice—drew the two white boys together down the lake bank. . . . Bobo’s song, like a magic carpet, eased them away from the shore and out into the deeper water” (184).

⁸⁹ See Louis Mars work *The Crisis of Possession in Voodoo* for more on Voodoo possession. Alfred Métraux also devotes a chapter-long study of the topic in his work *Voodoo in Haiti*.

⁹⁰ The term is also spelled *zonbi* or *zombie*.

⁹¹ The townspeople believe The Rider “had done been brung back from the dead by a hoodoo woman” (Nordan 25).

⁹² A *boko* is a Voodoo black magician. Métraux details the beliefs about and roles of *zombis* in his chapter on “Magic and Sorcery.”

⁹³ Li Gran Zombi seems to be an American Voodoo invention, and is not found in Haitian Voodoo. There are also discrepancies as to the god’s depiction. In some Voodoo beliefs, Li Gran Zombi is a powerful serpent god who has the ability to pass between the realms of the living and the dead. In these beliefs, the god is a separate god from Damballah-Wedo. In many Voodoo beliefs, Li Gran Zombi is another name for

Damballah-Wedo, another powerful, serpent god thought to be the origin of life and wisdom. The way Nordan describes The Rider strongly links the association of Li Gran Zombi with Damballah-Wedo. Glassman contains a descriptive section on both in *Vodou Visions*. Puckett also references the importance of Li Gran Zombi in Voodoo beliefs on pages 178-179.

⁹⁴ During the second encounter, The Rider is described as “the frail, frail little albino blues man, with white nappy hair and pink skin,” (Nordan 95) and a little later “his pink skin looked pinker than ever” (Nordan 100).

⁹⁵ This laughter occurs on pages 99, 100, and 102.

⁹⁶ According to Leach, “[t]he position is taken that attitudes are most frequently acquired through observational learning, are rather impervious to verbal persuasion, and, subject to situational influences, tend to result in intentions that guide observable behaviors” (69). Leach also notes that “[i]t is thought that the attitudes of whites toward people of color are acquired in the same manner as other attitudes and that they most often change as a result of either direct or vicarious experience that is inconsistent or in conflict with previous attitudes” (69).

⁹⁷ In fact, when Mr. Raney comes to help the boys after their discovery, he says, “‘It’s probably the nigger Mr. Solon and Mr. Dexter done kilt’” (Nordan 187).

⁹⁸ Divination, prophecy, and visions are such common occurrences in Voodoo that all books on the topic contain large sections devoted to explanations of the different types and/or stories about actual occurrences. Each method provides insight into the future. While most divination is in the form of readings, actual visions also occur. Puckett gives one such account of a “conjure-doctor” named Ed Murphy. In the account, Puckett notes that Murphy “lies down on his back at night, folds his arms, and a whole troop of visions swing into sight. He can see his enemies coming; can see the future. . . .By looking through a clear pebble dipped in water he claims to be able to induce these visions—in much the same manner as crystal gazing” (205).

⁹⁹ Despite her attempts to dismiss the vision, it haunts her. Her uncle, Runt, even admonishes her that “‘a child in a raindrop ain’t a dream’” (Nordan 89).

¹⁰⁰ The children sitting next to Alice are her fourth grade students. Alice is notorious for taking her class on misguided field trips, the murder trial being one. Other misguided fieldtrips include a trip to a funeral home and the sewer.

¹⁰¹ Looking around the courtroom, Alice sees “[a]ll those white people down there! White! Even to Alice it looked like an abomination of some kind. White, white, bird dooky, white, it was sickening, a pestilence!” (Nordan 226).

¹⁰² She even admits to Sally Anne that she wanted to buy a mojo, a Voodoo charm for warding off evil, after her vision.

¹⁰³ While Bhabha is referring to the minority population, this is equally applicable to the transformed white population in *Wolf Whistle*. Bhabha also adds, as the transformed characters become aware of, that “[t]he concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation” (34).

¹⁰⁴ Another example of this occurs when Uncle Runt’s wife leaves him. Alice moves in to care for the family, and “[s]he pretended like it was a good home” (Nordan 79).

¹⁰⁵ Building a metaphor, she also sees Uncle as Ahab, for he is the only black witness who can identify the white murders, and to do so he must fight and overcome the “white whale” in the courtroom.

¹⁰⁶ Stewart notes that “Houston lies at the intersection of three great traditions of folk magic” (“Re: Mockingbird” par. 26).

¹⁰⁷ In fact, Dr. Manzetti, a professor specializing in folk magic in America at Tulane who comes to buy her mother’s collection, tells her “[r]ight now there are *gods* in that cabinet. By the time they get to the trunk of my care they will be just puppets. That is a loss” (Stewart 136). Toni replies, “[i]f you think that, Dr. Manzetti, then you have never lived with a god” (Stewart 136).

¹⁰⁸ As Stewart describes, the father, who remains unnamed, is a traveling salesman, and daughters Toni and Candy grow “up in a garden, with a cranky white stucco house thrown in as an afterthought. The house. . .

.was laid out in the old Spanish style, one room per floor. . . .Both upper floors had long balconies with rust-spotted wrought-iron railings that squeaked and swayed when me and Candy swung on them” (15-16).

¹⁰⁹ Also her boyfriend, Carlos, is described as “a Tex-Mex car detailer” (Stewart 19), thus given a distinct race. Further disassociations of the family’s race include Toni identifying a friend’s girlfriend as “a young black woman” (Stewart 268), and telling Candy their mother would have “Told you not to sleep with a wetback” (Stewart 254).

¹¹⁰ As Stewart slyly comments, “[t]he book seems to be fascinated by certain kinds of otherness, and scared of them at the same time; you have to assume there is a reason that Toni, the more rigid sister, also has the fewest of those inter-racial markers, while Candy is clearly associated with Hispanic culture and Elena with some blurred echo of the black experience coming out of New Orleans” (“RE: Mockingbird” par. 24).

¹¹¹ As Bhabha says, “[t]he natural(ized), unifying discourse of ‘nation’, ‘peoples’, or authentic ‘folk’ tradition, those embedded myths of culture’s particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great though unsettling advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition” (172).

¹¹² The Riders, as they are called, assume the position of the original, Voodoo *loa*. They possess Elena and, later, Toni, in the same manner. In addition to “mounting” the host when they take possession, the Riders are also described as being in complete control of their hosts’ minds and bodies, similar to traditional Voodoo. As Toni says after a possession, “When the gods came into my head, they had obliterated me. Blotted me out” (Stewart 134).

¹¹³ Regarding the Beauchamps’ Voodoo, Stewart comments that “[t]raditional voodoo is done by black rural people in Haiti. To borrow a phrase from Tolkien, I cordially loathe that kind of thing: the slap-pasting of one set of myths or mores into the wrong context. It’s like those books where you meet elves in shopping malls: kinda forced and missing the point. . . .The trick is making the right car for your time and generation and road system” (“RE: Mockingbird” pars. 17, 19).

¹¹⁴ Either the offerings left for the Riders (a Bible, lipsticks, perfumes, cards, and dice) do not match offerings suitable for any of the *loa*, or the offering and description of the Rider together do not match that of any *loa*.

¹¹⁵ See *Mockingbird* for more detailed information on each *loa*.

¹¹⁶ After drinking, Toni feels a whiteness “behind my eyes, back in my head, and it was cold. . . .the light in the garden got suddenly dimmer. Silence fell over the world. I could see birds with their beaks working, but no songs came. Acorns fell into the pond without splashing. . . .Then I smelled the Widow smells, of silver polish and scorched cloth, and I knew what was happening. . . .Then the whiteness exploded in my head and the Widow came” (Stewart 20-21).

¹¹⁷ In Voodoo, possession only occurs to those who are 1) devoted followers of particular *loa* and 2) to those receptive to possession.

¹¹⁸ Candy does possess the ability to have visions, something which often occurs in Voodoo. However, even Candy’s prophetic ability is slightly askew from traditional Voodoo, for she can “see the future sometimes . . . but with one curious qualifier: all she ever saw were happy things” (Stewart 17).

¹¹⁹ Toni finds it “embarrassing to admit that your mother can see the future, read minds, perform miracles, and raise the dead. It was something I held against her for a long time” (Stewart 1).

¹²⁰ In fact, Toni, referring to her mother and her Voodoo, tells her father, “‘If Momma thinks I’m going to start now, with all the spookery and horseshit—No ma’am. You can’t have everything your way. Not after you’re dead. . . .If she wanted to pass along her nasty little presents, she should have done it while she was still alive’” (Stewart 29). Later, worrying about how much of her mother is in her, Toni says, “Momma. Momma in me like a cancer, in my bones and brain and lungs” (Stewart 159).

¹²¹ Stewart says that “[t]he book seems to be fascinated by certain kinds of otherness, and scared of them at the same time; you have to assume there is a reason that Toni, the more rigid sister, also has the fewest of those inter-racial markers, while Candy is clearly associated with Hispanic culture and Elena with some blurred echo of the black experience coming out of New Orleans” (doc??).

¹²² Similarly, Toni fears she “will be another crazy Beauchamp woman, driven half-mad by Riders. . . .You used to be sane, you used to be in control. But now the Riders can get into you. Maybe Sugar will whore

you out next time, or the Preacher will beat your child for its sins. You are out of control, Antoinette. You're no safer than Elena now" (Stewart 92).

¹²³ At one point, Toni looks "at my dumpy reflection leaning out of the glass toward me. Round head, round face, stocky limbs. The nicest thing you can say about my face is that it's 'amiable'" (Stewart 52).

¹²⁴ As Harbeck notes, "the greater the extent to which important parts of the Self are relegated to the unconscious, the greater the need for their reintegration with the ego, and the greater the pressure they exert on the edges of the ego, potentially leading to dramatic mental destabilization" (15).

Chapter III: The Magic of Gender: Body Stereotype and Metamorphosis in Philip Roth, Angela Carter, and Doug Rice

¹²⁵ To distinguish Doug Rice the author from Doug Rice the character, I will refer to the author as Rice and the character as Doug from this point forward. Additionally, while Christian Moraru also looks at Kepesh's metamorphosis and the way it "revise[s] and re-encode[s] previous fables and discourses of the body, gender, and humanity" (47), he focuses on how metamorphosis indicates posthumanity, as well as how posthumanity is a response to "previous works (for Roth, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*), artifacts, and cultural discourse" (47). For more on this, see his article "Intertextual Bodies: Three Steps on the Ladder of Posthumanity."

¹²⁶ As Carolyn Bynum claims of metamorphosis stories, we "find . . . a profound and powerful way of thinking about what we call 'identity' in all its senses" (180). Both Bruce Clarke in *Allegories of Writing: The Subject of Metamorphosis* and Marina Warner in "Magic and Metamorphosis: Circes' Wand, Aesop's Wit" also look at the relationship between identity and metamorphosis.

¹²⁷ See Faris's chapter "'Along the Knife-Edge of Change': Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Dynamics of Alterity" and D'haen's article "Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers" for more on this topic. Additionally, as Stephen Slemon says in "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," the style "carries a residuum of resistance toward the imperial center and to its totalizing systems of generic classification" (408).

¹²⁸ Recognizing this change, Elizabeth Sabiston says Kepesh undergoes a "'sea change' enabling him to integrate both halves of the human [gender] experience into an androgynous whole" (32) in *The Breast*. Roberta Rubenstein comments that Carter, utilizing myth and historicity in *The Passion of New Eve*, "explore(s), exaggerate(s), and occasionally parod(ies) the dark fantasies and nightmares that maintain or fracture gendered reality" (104). Finally, Rice bluntly says *The Blood of Mugwump* "is body . . . Not my body. Just body" ("Reviewing" 256).

¹²⁹ Heather Looy and Hessel Bouma III in "The Nature of Gender: Gender Identity in Persons Who are Intersexed or Transgendered," and Mark Finn and Pippa Dell in "Practices of Body Management: Transgenderism and Embodiment" give definitions of transgenderism similar to those of Heyes and Reis.

¹³⁰ As Heyes writes, "I use *transsexual* to describe anyone who undergoes (or hopes to undergo any of a number of physical interventions to bring hir sexed body more closely into line with hir gender identity" (1093-94). Heyes follows Leslie Feinberg's proposal, with hir replacing her/his and ze replacing he/she. Leslie M. Lothstein in "Psychological Testing with Transsexuals: A 30-Year Review" and Reis also define transsexuality similar to Heyes. While, excepting Doug, the characters do not choose to become the opposite sex, their metamorphoses do bring about their transsexuality.

¹³¹ Butler also says that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33).

¹³² Butler writes more on this on pages 174-76.

¹³³ Nancy Holstrom's article looks at the way gender is constructed socially and environmentally. Sara Willott and Christine Griffin's "Redundant Men: Constraints on Identity and Change," Ximena E. Mejía's "Gender Matters: Working Adult Male Survivors of Trauma," and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* all inspect masculinity as a social construction. Furthermore, as Jessica Benjamin writes, "femininity is not a preexisting 'thing' that is repudiated by the male psyche; rather it is constructed by it" (45). Accordingly, this is also true of masculinity.

¹³⁴ While I have simplified this theory, Waniek goes into more detail in her article "Meaning in Gender Theory: Clarifying a Basic Problem from a Linguistic-Philosophical Perspective." As many gender terms

are subjective and universalistic, most scholars wish to redefine these terms in order to reflect gender equality. However, given the social and cultural implications these terms carry and the easily recognizable assumptions that pervade them, it is nearly impossible to abandon either. As Waniek claims, "Whatever the respective historical and cultural group claims as a gender/sexual norm determines which features constitute the dominant notion of 'man' or 'woman' and which group of features is operative in the formation of the plural (*men, women*)" (51-52). I in no way wish to imply that certain characteristics are typical only of men or only of women. Yet, as these assumptions are already in play, social perceptions do align them with particular genders. Therefore, in order to highlight the way each author examines gender, I also will utilize these traditional divisions and terms.

¹³⁵ Kai Mikkonen touches on this in her article on *The Breast*, noting that "What Kepesh, in fact, realizes here is that one's sexual identity is not simply physical, but may be based finally on one's mental orientation" (36). However, she does not go into how this mental orientation is a direct result of cultural influence. Joanna Trevenna discusses Carter's use of performativity in "Gender as Performance: questioning the 'Butlerification' of Angela Carter's fiction," while Jean Wyatt examines how Carter reveals gender's social construction in "The Violence of Gendering: Castration Images in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and 'Peter and the Wolf.'" Finally, Rice addresses both topics in an online interview, "An Interview/Response with Doug Rice." In this interview, he also talks about "safe" images of transgendered individuals as cross-dressers vs. the public fear of the "normal," man-next-door as transgendered.

¹³⁶ As Kepesh laments, "We really did get on so easily and with so little strain, we liked each other so much that it seemed to me something very like a disaster" (Roth 10).

¹³⁷ This is also seen when his father "leaves—without kissing me. Something new for my father and me. And that is when I realize all that this has cost him; that is when I realize that it is a performance and that my father is a great and noble man" (Roth 37).

¹³⁸ Additionally, Kepesh says, "Sightless, I could still picture my former mentor: in his blue blazer with the paisley lining made in London by Kilgore, French, who had clothed Jack Kennedy before him—in his soft flannel trousers and gleaming Gucci loafers, the diplomatic Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, soon to be Secretary-General of the U.N. at the very least. . . . Wearing his not-too-kempt, not-too-unkempt mop of impressive salt-and-pepper hair" (Roth 66).

¹³⁹ As Kepesh says, "there was his renowned self-possession to assure us that he would not be benumbed or horrified, or what was worse, unduly plaintive or consoling" (Roth 65).

¹⁴⁰ As Kepesh notes, even the act of speaking "required that I virtually give a recitation, as from a stage, whenever I wanted to make my every word understood" (Roth 88).

¹⁴¹ Even Kepesh admits to leaving off his Othello recitation because "I realized that I was being observed . . . Why should I want to appear any more foolish, or any more pathetic than I already do?" (Roth 103).

¹⁴² Eve observes, "I know nothing. I am a tabula erasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no; both more or less than a real woman" (Carter 83).

¹⁴³ Consequently, she fears Zero discovering the truth, for she knows "[s]omething in me rang false; he knew it by some atavistic intuition" (Carter 106).

¹⁴⁴ This occurs after Zero exposes and humiliates Tristessa, believing she has caused his impotency.

¹⁴⁵ As Eve says, "How much he must have both loved and hated women, to let Tristessa be so beautiful and make her suffer so!" (Carter 144). Furthermore, Tristessa corroborates this, saying, "'Passivity. . . Inaction. That time should not act upon me, that I should not die. So I was seduced by the notion of a woman's being, which is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being. To be everything and nothing'" (Carter 137).

¹⁴⁶ Similar satirization occurs when Grandma Mugwump, after her husband, Andreas Torgov, shows her how to transform into a woman, gets a "job as a woman. Listening. The dishes aren't done. Hearing all those men confessing their needs to sin" (Rice 85). Grandma Mugwump knows she is giving a performance, and, she also knows the men she listens to do not comprehend either her performance or their own. Consequently, she satirizes their expectations of women with such anecdotal sayings as "[b]eat me.

Be my mommy. . . I've got something here for you. . . I'm your mommy and you've been so naughty. . ." (Rice 85).

¹⁴⁷ Mejía writes that "By creating an ideology of masculinity and forcing males to internalize that ideology through various socialization practices . . . a culture produces an entire class of humans who struggle mightily to reject within themselves any semblance of vulnerability, any sign or feeling of fear, and who certainly never manifest externally any sign of those dreaded emotions"(34).

¹⁴⁸ Kepesh is continually astonished at his father's poise and strength, wondering if he is "a god or is he a simpleton, or is he numb?" (Roth 37). Kepesh also describes his father as "Hard-working, cunning, even tyrannical—this I did know from observing him all those years at his work; with us, his little family, he had been short-tempered, demanding, innocent, protective, tender, and deeply in love" (Roth 35-36).

¹⁴⁹ In fact, he later admits he "had never been able to believe that it was to his [Schonbrunn's] wife's Kennedyesque dreams, rather than his own, that he had sacrificed his belletristic gifts" (Roth 63).

¹⁵⁰ Kepesh even admits he "babbled to my Daddy . . . and then, once again, in my joy, I wept" (Roth 88).

¹⁵¹ Sophia is the woman in charge of Eve at Beulah, the headquarters for the women's movement and the place where she undergoes her metamorphosis.

¹⁵² As Eve relates, "I recall particularly three video-tape sequences designed to assist me to adjust to my new shape. One consisted of . . . every single Virgin and Child that had ever been painted in the entire history of Western European art. . . There was also a video-tape intended, I think, to subliminally instill the maternal instinct itself. . . And another, more inscrutable video-tape, composed of a variety of non-phallic imagery such as sea-anemones opening and closing" (Carter 72).

¹⁵³ These references occur on pages 15 (3x), 19 (6x), 21, 26, 30, 34 (3x), 35 (2x), 57, 60, 61, 68 (3x), 69, 73, 75, 93, 94 (2x), 95 (4x), 101, 107, 116, 121 (2x), 123, and 131 (2x), not to mention all the times he refers to history as well.

¹⁵⁴ For more on this, see Gerhard's book *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982*.

¹⁵⁵ Gerhard writes more about this, as well as about the theories of dominant feminists such as Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, and Shulamith Firestone in her work. In fact, it was Friedan's important work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that questioned how much women lost of themselves fulfilling maternal and domestic roles. Firestone, in *The Dialectic of Sex*, argued that women would only be free if they were freed from reproduction.

¹⁵⁶ Gerhard attributes this switch in thought to Adrienne Rich's influential 1976 work *Of Woman Born*.

¹⁵⁷ As Gregory J. Robinson says, *The Passion of New Eve* "is aimed at demonstrating the real problems of life as a woman in a male-dominated society and culture" (737).

¹⁵⁸ Additionally, Gilley notes that third wave feminism reflects "[a]n awareness of and respect for multiplicity even within one's self . . . [and] celebrates contradiction, complexity, and individual freedom of choice" (189). Similarly, Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman cite that "[c]ommon threads running through the diverse feminisms of the third wave are their foci on difference, deconstruction, and decentering" (57).

¹⁵⁹ Amber E. Kinser also notes the way third wave feminism embraces contradiction and plurality in her article "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism."

¹⁶⁰ Gilley says third wave feminism argues that "it is time to rethink the position that girls doing traditionally male activities is feminist, but girls doing traditionally female activities is not" (190).

¹⁶¹ Kinser, however, finds this policy problematic, leading to "weak" feminism. As she comments, "My point is not that feminists should spend a great deal of time arguing over who and what are more and less feminist, though I do strongly believe that such dialogue is important and ought to be given voice. My point is that we should find ways to talk about it somehow, and that we are fooling ourselves if we think we can make feminism be all things to all people" (146).

¹⁶² Carol A. B. Warren speaks specifically about Fred Phelps, a disbarred attorney and Baptist minister who, along with his followers, pickets homosexual events. According to Warren, the group carries signs saying such things as "'God hates Fags'" and "'AIDS is God's way of Punishing Fags'" (511).

¹⁶³ As Marilyn Frye notes, "women's service work always includes personal service . . . sexual service . . . and ego service" (97). Frye expands on what each role entails in *The Politics of Reality*.

¹⁶⁴ As Kepesh says, it was a “Grand Guignol marriage (and . . . [a] lacerating divorce)” (Roth 10).

¹⁶⁵ Kepesh says about marriage that “by virtue of my own unfortunate encounter with it—singular as my experience may have been, it had nonetheless produced in me a monumental capacity for abstinence, and I swore that I would never touch the stuff again” (Roth 9). Consequently, this also means that Claire’s own refusal to marry fills Kepesh’s selfish needs. Not only does he not have to marry again, but also their arrangement eliminates any obligations to her.

¹⁶⁶ Kepesh says Helen’s life “is even more horrible now than it was when together we suffered that disaster known as our marriage” (Roth 94).

¹⁶⁷ She eats glass and goes to a shady abortionist, which leaves her bleeding and near death.

¹⁶⁸ As Eve notes, his dog, Cain, “was the one thing Zero loved” (Carter 90).

¹⁶⁹ While he allows his pigs to roam wherever they want, his wives are “not allowed to shoo away the pigs nor the chorus of piglets that snare our feet to trip us up everywhere we went, or Zero would beat us” (Carter 94).

¹⁷⁰ Evelyn makes a similar remark after abandoning Leilah. He claims that “the slow delirious sickness of femininity, its passivity, its narcissism, have infected me because of her. She has been doubly degraded, through her race and through her sex; this affliction she has given me is therefore twice as virulent, I might die of it” (Carter 37-38).

¹⁷¹ Sophia reinforces this during her lecture to Eve. In this lecture, she summarizes the history of male domination and violence against women, telling Eve “[h]ow the Ancient Chinese had crippled their women’s feet; the Jews had chained the ankles of their women together; and the Indians had ordered widows to immolate themselves on the pyres of their husbands and so on and so forth, hour after hour was devoted to the relation of the horrors my old sex had perpetrated on my new one” (Carter 73).

¹⁷² Similarly, when first captured, Evelyn says “I knew I was a criminal because I was imprisoned, although I knew of no crime which I had committed” (Carter 53).

¹⁷³ As Trevenna says, “the satiric portrayal of the feminist Beulah women in *The Passion of New Eve* reveals Carter’s critical response to the essentializing and universalizing tendencies of certain aspects of 1970s feminism” (268).

¹⁷⁴ As Evelyn describes, “[f]emale sharp-shooters took to sniping from concealed windows at men. . . . They blew up wedding shops and scoured the newspapers for marriage announcements so they could send brides gifts of well-honed razors” (Carter 17).

¹⁷⁵ Rubenstein, Lenora Ledwon, Johanna Trevenna, Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira, and Gregory J. Robinson all write about Carter’s deconstruction of archetypes in their respective articles. As Robinson says, Carter “rewrite[s] archetypal representations of woman as Mother, Nature, Biblical Eve, sex symbol or screen icon, profane whore, sacred virgin, and the sources of these archetypes” (721).

¹⁷⁶ Additionally, the light in Beulah’s tunnels is “pinkish, like an artificial evening” (Carter 56). Even the broth Eve is fed “was synthetic-tasting. . . . Then she [Sophia] gave me some pseudo-milk pudding” (Carter 54).

¹⁷⁷ Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira notes, Mother is “a giant parody of womanhood, a pantomime of a monstrous mythological mother goddess” (“Uncanny” 472).

¹⁷⁸ Robinson says, “Mother, then, is a parody of the maternal archetype and how warped the *concept* of motherhood has become, not only in androcentric discourses like psychoanalysis, but in some feminist circles” (725).

¹⁷⁹ Similarly, another police officer tells Doug “[t]here are all sorts of people out there who can help you,” While another asks if he is “‘some sort of Frankenstein or something? . . . Where’d you come from, fuck-up? Not from here, not from this earth. . . . Yeah, not from here, not from us. Not any of us did that, made you’” (Rice 26, 27).

¹⁸⁰ These instances occur in Chapter Four: Of Lightning & Disordered Souls.

¹⁸¹ The emphasis on us is my own.

¹⁸² Debra Shostak’s article “Return to *The Breast*: The Body, the Masculine Subject, and Philip Roth,” Sabiston’s article “A New Fable for Critics: Philip Roth’s *The Breast*,” and Kai Mikkonen’s article “The Metamorphosed Parodical Body in Philip Roth’s *The Breast*” all look at feminization and feminine passivity in the text.

¹⁸³ Unable to reconstitute his sexual appetite, he finds their “lovemaking boring and pleasureless. . . Finally I just did not care at all about touching her or being touched” (Roth 10, 11).

¹⁸⁴ The emphasis on unmanned is my own.

¹⁸⁵ Shostak notes that Kepesh is transformed into a “female breast” (323), Kai Mikkonen states Kepesh is transformed “into part of a woman . . . [which] questions socially defined gender roles” (35), and Clayton Koelb also claims the breast is “a female breast” (119).

¹⁸⁶ The emphasis on “grants” is my own.

¹⁸⁷ For more on this, see Benjamin’s article.

¹⁸⁸ Kepesh claims, at one point, that “the sensations were almost more than could be borne” (Roth 24). Later, Kepesh says after the stimulation, “my writhing would cause the hammock to sway to and fro for long, glorious minutes on end” (Roth 25).

¹⁸⁹ For more on this, see Benjamin’s article.

¹⁹⁰ Of course, Leilah reacts exactly as Evelyn believes she would/should, submitting “to the beatings and the degradations. . . [until she] became as limp, passive and obedient as I could wish” (Carter 28, 34).

¹⁹¹ Even when she is first captured, she adopts this passive attitude, wondering, “[a]t whose mercy is poor Eve now” (Carter 85).

¹⁹² As she says, her “womanhood” was modeled on them, relegating “me always to the shadowed half of being of reflected light” (Carter 72).

¹⁹³ Eve claims that “the result of my apprenticeship as a woman was, of course, that my manner became a little too emphatically feminine” (Carter 101).

¹⁹⁴ Ledwon corroborates this, saying, “Tristessa is too much a masculine construction of the hyperfeminine where femininity is equated with passive suffering” (31).

¹⁹⁵ Again, Carter infuses this with Biblical connotations, for after Eve and Tristessa’s first sexual encounter, Eve “got off the bed and looked for some rag to cover my nakedness because I had grown suddenly ashamed of it” (Carter 138). Later, after a second consensual and fulfilling sexual encounter with Tristessa, Eve comments, “[h]ere we were at the beginning or end of the world and I, in my sumptuous flesh, was in myself the fruit of the tree of knowledge” (Carter 146). While she attributes this knowledge to her makers, it is actually the beginning of her own knowledge about herself, as a woman.

¹⁹⁶ These references occur on pages 9, 33, 87, 106, and 130.

¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Bakhtin notes that “The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming” (24).

¹⁹⁸ Rice’s use of snake imagery in relation to the characters occurs on pages 10, 11, 26, 36, 38, 39, 40, 55, 57, 87, 109, 116, 137, and 138.

¹⁹⁹ This is further emphasized when Grandma Mugwump dies and Caddie, “cut blood out of Grandma and swallowed the echoes of Grandma’s snake magic” (Rice 116).

²⁰⁰ Later, Doug also notes that “Caddie ran into my bedroom and showed me once again the magic of her blood. Marked, but with pain unknown to me, she was still alive” (Rice 135).

²⁰¹ For more on this, see Violet’s interview with Rice.

²⁰² As Rice says, “[t]here’s a chapter in *Mugwump* that transforms the writing of Kristeva and Irigaray into body” (qtd. in Violet par. 14).

²⁰³ As Susan Gal comments, “societal institutions are not neutral contexts for talk. They are organized to define, demonstrate, and enforce the legitimacy and authority of linguistic strategies used by one gender—or men of one class or ethnic group—while denying the power of others. Forms that diverge are devalued by the dominant ideologies (418).

²⁰⁴ This occurs when he propositions Miss Clark, when Schonbrunn laughs at him, and after regaling his father with his theories about his predicament.

²⁰⁵ Kepesh also comments that “I experienced myself as speaking to others like one buried in, and very nearly strangled by, his own adipose tissue” (Roth 74).

²⁰⁶ Evelyn also says Leilah is “indecipherable” and “incoherent,” her “argot or patois was infinitely strange to me, I could hardly understand a word she said” (Carter 21, 26).

²⁰⁷ For example, when he strides angrily into a room, he is “howling like a wolf. . . [and the] girls fell back, silenced” (Carter 89).

²⁰⁸ Later, as a woman, Doug says, “between my thighs I felt the making of language” (Rice 44), and after his grandmother’s death he “can still hear your cunt speaking” (Rice 125).

²⁰⁹ References to the “word made flesh” occur on pages 10, 40, 47, 50, 58, 103, and 116.

²¹⁰ The emphasis here is my own.

²¹¹ Later, as a man, Doug also claims he is “a speechless marvel” (Rice 103). Other references to his speechlessness as a man occur on pages 10 and 24. Similarly, Doug says of Torgov, “Poppy lost many words in that [Grandma Mugwump’s] bed. Never to be heard again. Poppy’s vocabulary suffered from such losses. His sentences lacked verbs and an occasional adjective” (Rice 107).

²¹² Butler says “[t]he internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” (30).

²¹³ Brenda Mae Woodhill and Curtis A. Samuels’ article, “Desirable and Undesirable Androgyny: A Prescription for the Twenty-First Century,” Hilge Landweer’s “Anthropological, social, and Moral Limitations of a Multiplicity of Genders,” and Notman’s “The Female Body and Its Meaning” are just a few of the works that also address the binary gender problem.

²¹⁴ As Butler says, “[i]ntelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (23).

²¹⁵ Regarding gender identity, Butler says, “[a]s in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is a repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” (178).

²¹⁶ Another such denial occurs on pages 40-41.

²¹⁷ Kepesh even believes he must “convince” his audience “that I am still a man” (Roth 53). Later, Kepesh even worries that, in giving in to his “grotesque” sexual desires, “I might be severing myself irreparably from my own past and my own kind” (Roth 56). As Shostak says, “Roth’s choice to transform Kepesh into a female breast allows him to uncover the ways in which subjectivity is inextricable from the gendering of the body” (33).

²¹⁸ Another instance of this occurs in Kepesh’s revulsion at the thought of administering to Claire if she were to turn into a giant penis. Kepesh confesses, “I have not been able to free myself from feelings of shame at the thought that I could never have been capable of the devotion demonstrated by this . . . young woman” (Roth 39-40).

²¹⁹ Mikkonen comments that “the narrative creates a situation of sexual ambiguity. One’s sexuality is not found to be simply physical or unconscious but appears to be based on one’s conscious self and mental orientation as well” (37).

²²⁰ First, he equates himself to “aquatic mammals,” not only because of the bodily resemblance, but also “because the porpoise in particular is said to be an intelligent, perhaps even rational creature” (Roth 31). His next step is the complete denial of his metamorphosis. In fact, he comes to believe “that my sense of myself as a breast, my life as a breast, was the delusion of a lunatic” (Roth 73).

²²¹ Other references occur on pages 135, 148, and 149.

²²² As Ferreira notes, Carter hints “at the desirability of a certain fusion between the sexes” (“Myth” 288).

²²³ Doug’s other references to Adam and Eve’s separation as unnatural occur on pages 76, 97, 111, and 124.

²²⁴ Other such references occur on pages 11, 20, 29, 126, 132, and 138.

Chapter IV: The Supernatural and Cultural Agency

²²⁵ Zamora explores the role of ghosts within magical realist fiction in her article “Ghostly Presences: Magical Realism in Contemporary Fiction of the Americas,” as does Arthur Redding in “‘Haints’: American Ghosts, Ethnic Memory, and Contemporary Fiction.”

²²⁶ While Carlin is not marginalized because of her race, she is marginalized because of her class. As a member of the white, lower class, she is removed from the dominant, white culture. Carlin is then doubly marginalized through her alienation from her own, lower class community.

²²⁷ As Derrida says, “a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” (11).

²²⁸ Kathleen Brogan also notes that “[g]hosts in contemporary American ethnic literature function similarly: to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present” (4).

²²⁹ As Brogan says, “the ghosts in stories of cultural hauntings are agents of both cultural memory *and* cultural renewal: the shape-shifting ghost who transmits erased or threatened group memory represents the creative, ongoing process of ethnic redefinition” (12).

²³⁰ Zamora also writes of this in her article.

²³¹ Neil Wright talks more of this in his article. Similarly, Roland Walter notes that Power “uses the dual character of magical realism – the harmonious intertwinement of the natural and supernatural categories of reality – as a means of resistance to internal colonization and the resulting disruptions of psyche, memory, and identity” (68). Additionally, Margara Averbach looks more generally at Native American myth, belief, and history in her article “Technology, ‘Magic,’ and Resistance in Native American Women’s Writing.”

²³² Deborah Horvitz writes about the role of memory and history in “Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*,” while Kristin Boudreau’s article “Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” looks at the history of violence and the role of pain in constructing the self, to name just a few of the many examining Morrison’s *Beloved*.

²³³ For more on Redding’s analysis, see his article. Additionally, Cynthia Dobbs’ “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Bodies Returned, Modernism Revisited,” Jan Furman’s “Sethe’s Re-memories: The Covert Return of What is Best Forgotten,” Eusebio L. Rodrigues’s “The Telling of *Beloved*,” and Karla F. C. Holloway’s “*Beloved*: A Spiritual” all discuss *Beloved*’s use of African, oral tradition and “rememory” as part of the healing process.

²³⁴ Speaking generally of African American and Native American magical realist works, Walter says they are linked to “world view[s] deeply steeped in the myths and legends of cultures with a ritualistic-religious foundation” (64). Similarly, Wright looks specifically at “the weaving of many ancestral stories and legends into a true narrative whole” (39) in *The Grass Dancer*, while Linda Krumholz looks at the role of ritual, the trickster character, and the history of slavery in *Beloved*.

²³⁵ Brogan also writes that “the contemporary American ghost story is . . . a pan-ethnic phenomenon” (3-4).

²³⁶ Monica McDermott and Frank L. Samson discuss both the practice and problems of white privilege in their article “White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States,” as do Gregory Jay and Sandra Elaine Jones in “Whiteness Studies and the Multicultural Literature Classroom.”

²³⁷ For more on this, see McDermott and Samson’s article.

²³⁸ At this point, very little critical attention is given to either Charlene or Denver, yet the affects of ghosts on these characters are crucial to understanding the role ghosts play in each work. Much of *The Grass Dancer*’s criticism is devoted to Harley Wind Soldier’s visions and ghostly guidance, which Walter sees as a “ritual power” that heals (67-70). Less attention has been given to Charlene Thunder’s own evolution through such guidance. Similarly, Krumholz’s and Horvitz’s essays, as well Elizabeth B. House’s “Toni Morrison’s Ghost: The Beloved that was not Beloved” are only three of the articles on *Beloved* that focus on Sethe’s healing. Redding makes a brief reference to the impact *Beloved* has on Denver, stating, “*Beloved* is in some sense Denver’s coming of age story” (171), but he does not go into anymore detail. Krumholz simply notes, “In her lonely withdrawal from the world, due in part to Sethe’s isolation, Denver is as trapped by Sethe’s past as Sethe’s inability to find to find psychological freedom as Sethe herself is” (119), but also does not go into any further detail about *Beloved*’s impact on Denver.

²³⁹ Maryanne O’Hara explores this aspect of Alice Hoffman’s works, while Walter and Wright explore this in Power’s *The Grass Dancer*. Similarly, Linda Krumholz and Carl D. Malmgren examine this in *Beloved*.

²⁴⁰ For more on this, see T. L. Zutlevics’ article “Towards a Theory of Oppression,” and the *Higher Education Report*’s “Dominant Cultures, Oppression, and Other Societal Issues Affecting the Identity Development of Diverse Populations.”

²⁴¹ Zutlevics asserts that “[o]ne is resiliently autonomous when one is able to both realize and reasonably project into the future a life plan of one’s own choosing. Hence in non-oppressive societies, external factors or circumstances, such as others’ personality or the rise of political parties, would not present an impediment to people living in accordance with their own values and desires” (92).

²⁴² For more on this, see Derrida's chapter "Injunctions of Marx."

²⁴³ Derrida's chapter "Injunction of Marx" goes into more detail on this subject.

²⁴⁴ Gus also believes "he existed in a subuniverse, a world of losers, a world of pain, located in the basement of reality, several levels beneath the realm of pretty faces and possibilities" (Hoffman 28).

²⁴⁵ The task is based on a myth revolving around former Haddan President Dr. Howe and his wife Annie. The marriage was unhappy, as Howe was unfaithful. According to the myth, Howe said he would give Annie a divorce if she could turn a white rose red. She could not, so she committed suicide in St. Anne's, the dorm named after her. Now, the dorm often smells overpoweringly of her white roses, even when they are not blooming.

²⁴⁶ Gus's death occurs when the boys dunk his head in a toilet. They are expecting Gus to struggle before they pull him out, but Gus is knocked unconscious when they push his head in the bowl, and the boys end up drowning him.

²⁴⁷ As Stamp Paid tells Paul D. years later, there "ain't a sweeter bunch of colored anywhere," but "[p]ride, well, that bothers em a bit. They can get messy when they think somebody's too proud" (Morrison 232).

²⁴⁸ In fact, the community thinks "[t]oo much. . . .Where does she get it all" (Morrison 137), and becomes increasingly furious with Baby Suggs' and Sethe's extravagant display.

²⁴⁹ This is particularly evident when Baby Suggs sniffs "the disapproval once again. . . .This free-floating repulsion was new. It wasn't the whitefolks—that much she could tell—so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (Morrison 138).

²⁵⁰ Never one "to receive valentines," Charlene finds that through the magic, "poetry erupted; her features were praised, her disposition complimented. It was fun for a few class periods, but eventually it became depressing" (Power 296).

²⁵¹ Gus's final nudge comes after Carlin has fled home to Florida, convinced that she will never fit into the Haddan School society. Once home, Carlin begins finding black stones everywhere: "on the back porch, in the kitchen sink, beneath her pillows" (Hoffman 322). Carlin also feels Gus's presence wherever she goes, and his coat persistently streams water. Thus, it is through Gus's guidance that Carlin finally decides to return to Haddan.

²⁵² Ecstatic to have found her parents, she tells her mother "'I know why you did it. We don't have to go through all that. I think I would do the same thing to get away'" (Power 306).

²⁵³ There is much debate over *Beloved*'s status as a ghost. Many scholars, such as Dobbs, see *Beloved* as a conflation of both those lost in the middle passage and of Sethe's dead daughter. Others, such as Martha J. Cutter, do not see *Beloved* as a ghost, but only as a middle passage survivor. Similarly, Carl D. Malmgren sees the novel as fantastic. In his view, however, the corporeal *Beloved* who emerges after Paul D chases the ghost from the house is not a ghost, but a woman who has survived the middle passage and escaped her white captors. Details about *Beloved* do match those of a girl held hostage and sexually abused by white men, match those of a woman surviving the middle passage, as well as match those of Sethe's dead daughter. For example, when *Beloved* talks of where she came from, she claims it is "'Dark. . . .I'm small in that place. . . .Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in'" and there are "'Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead'" (Morrison 75). These references, as well of others, call to mind descriptions of the middle passage aboard slave ships. When she says such things as there was a white man "in the house I was in. He hurt me" (Morrison 215), *Beloved* validates the belief that she escaped white captors. Her questions about the diamond earrings Sethe wore for her wedding and singing the song Sethe made up and sang to her children validate her existence as the ghost of Sethe's murdered child. I would agree with Deborah Horvitz, who sees *Beloved* as an amalgamation of all these aspects. However, for my purposes here, I am looking specifically at *Beloved* as a ghost.

²⁵⁴ Sethe also lets *Beloved* take "the best of everything—first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children. . . .None of which made the impression it was supposed to. *Beloved* accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her" (Morrison 241).

²⁵⁵ As Morrison writes, “little by little it dawned on Denver that if Sethe didn’t wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might” (Morrison 242).

²⁵⁶ Harry had “decided he wanted Carlin as soon as he spied her in the doorway to the library one rainy afternoon. . . .He knew right then that he had to have her, never doubting for a moment that like everything else he had wanted, she’d be his before long” (Hoffman 72). Furthermore, Harry only sees Carlin as another conquest. Having already “ruined” the lives of many of the girls at the school, he is “bored” with “those who persisted in calling him long after his disinterest was evident. . . .primed for a challenge . . . it amused him to wait for Carlin outside the gym” (Hoffman 73).

²⁵⁷ In fact, Carlin now starts avoiding Harry, noticing “the traits Gus had warned her about: the smile that could be turned on and off at will, the selfishness, the certainty that his own needs were at the center of the universe” (Hoffman 195).

²⁵⁸ Trudier Harris examines Beloved as demonic and the need to “exorcise” the demonic for peace to occur in her article “*Beloved*: ‘Woman, Thy Name is Demon.’”

²⁵⁹ Charlene witnesses this firsthand when in 8th grade. Mercury, deciding the outside of her house needs Christmas lights, forces her current lover up onto her snowy, icy roof to hang them. Even after he falls off the roof, Mercury still uses her magic to make him climb back up and finish hanging the lights. Similarly, when Mercury falls in love with Calvin Wind Soldier, a married man, all bets are off. Mercury uses every bit of magic she knows to make him fall in love with her. When she discovers he has been warned and given a rattlesnake belt to protect him, she is enraged. She works another spell, tricking him into an affair with his sister-in-law—an affair that also leads to a child.

²⁶⁰ Additionally, when she must tell the class a story, “Charlene’s voice was nearly a whisper. . . .Charlene imagined that the other students were smirking” (Power 63).

²⁶¹ For example, when the older girls on the swim team play a trick on the new girls, an initiation that is supposed to bond the girls as a team, Carlin ends up “even more withdrawn” and “unhappiness coursed through her” (Hoffman 39, 38).

²⁶² Denver completely withdraws from the rest of the world at age seven when classmate Nelson Lord forces her to confront Sethe’s actions. Nelson asks Denver, “‘Didn’t your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn’t you in there with her when she went?’” (Morrison 104). The community already shuns the family for Sethe’s actions, but this is the last straw for Denver. She quits going to school and completely isolates herself from the rest of the world, refusing to set foot off her family’s property. It is also at this point that Denver loses her hearing, completely cutting herself off from the world and the answers she is afraid to hear.

Chapter V: What Happens When the Body’s Gone? Dissolution, Death, and the Unknown in Katherine Vaz and Steven Millhauser

²⁶³ The matter Bachelard refers to are the four basic elements: water, air, fire and earth. For more on formal and material imagination, see the introduction to Bachelard’s text.

²⁶⁴ In fact, Lois Parkinson Zamora notes that “magical realism’s most basic concern” is “the nature and limits of the knowable” (119).

²⁶⁵ David K. Danow’s work *The Spirit of the Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* and Floyd Merrell’s article “The Ideal World in Search of its Reference: An Inquiry into the Underlying Nature of Magical Realism” also both address the relationship between magical realism and the unknown, as well as how they relate to modern society.

²⁶⁶ Vaz talks more about her use of magical realism and her cultural influences in her articles “My Hunt for King Sebastião: How We Invite Miracles into Art and Everyday Life” and “Songs of Fate: Portuguese Writing in America.”

²⁶⁷ Vaz says “[f]or those of us who must content ourselves with ordinary miracles . . . [l]earn to catalogue the fabulous realities in the world” (“My Hunt” 58).

²⁶⁸ Danielle Alexander, Pedro Ponce and Alicita Rodríguez, in their extensive examination of Millhauser’s works, give only two brief biographical paragraphs on the author. Quoting a passage from Jeffrey Cartwright, the narrator/biographer of *Edwin Millhouse*, regarding biography as order and inclusion, a

checklist of facts, the critics conclude that “[i]n this regard, the short biography of Steven Millhauser is now complete” (10).

²⁶⁹ Similarly, Mary Kinzie notes of his short fiction that he “has accomplished a remarkable compression of the realistic with the fantastic, creating in effect his own subtle, clever, funny, breathtaking, and delightful mode of magical realism” (116). Alexander, Ponce and Rodríguez believe that “[h]is tales, whether in the form of stories, novellas, or novels, manipulate reality, stretching it until it seeps into another realm—otherworldly, fantastic, and strange. . . . Millhauser’s uncanny talent for meticulous description, rending from his individual and our collective memories the details of quotidian life, slowly transforms reality into a dream” (8).

²⁷⁰ In her article “My Hunt for King Sebastião: How We Invite Miracles into Art and Everyday Life,” Vaz writes of multiple times in her life when the unknown and miraculous touched it.

²⁷¹ Millhauser says he became fascinated with this idea after discovering a passage in a philosophy book “that pointed out how no object is completely present in sight” (qtd. in Shepard 80).

²⁷² For example, when Mr. Porter gets in a car that is identical to his, a car that is known, he is completely thrown when it turns out to be someone else’s car.

²⁷³ According to Bloom, “[t]his helps explain why we believe in gods and an afterlife. Second, as we will see, our system of social understanding overshoots, inferring goals and desires where none exist. This makes us animists and creationists” (109).

²⁷⁴ As David P. Barash writes, “[o]ne of the organizing principles of existentialism is the basic notion that human beings have no ‘essence’. . . . For the existentialists, human beings define themselves, give themselves meaning, and establish their essence only via their existence: by what we do and how we choose to live our individual lives. This is because people have no essence (no human nature) independent of the specifics of how they choose to live” (1012). Both Barbara Forrest and Natalie Angier’s make similar comments in their respective articles.

²⁷⁵ This view is echoed in Barbara Forrest’s article “The Possibility of Meaning in Human Evolution,” and in Natalie Angier’s “My God Problem—and Theirs.” Often, this subject turns into a heated debate over science vs. theology. In fact, Angier attacks religious beliefs, saying, “I recognize that science doesn’t have all the answers and doesn’t pretend to, and that’s one of the things I love about it. But it has a pretty good notion of what’s probable or possible, and virgin births and carpenter rebirths just aren’t on the list” (134). As Michael Shermer says in “Is Science My Savior,” “I don’t think there is a God, or any sort of anthropomorphic being who needs to be worshipped, who listens to prayers, who keeps a moral scoreboard that will be settled in the end, or who cares one iota about who wins the Super Bowl. There is no afterlife. We just die, and that’s it” (49).

²⁷⁶ Despite the fact Helio does work on equations for transforming Clara into an angel, he quickly abandons them when his fears become too much. Furthermore, the equations never provide the answers he seeks, and in the end, he lets the water erase them.

²⁷⁷ As Michael E. Tymn believes, “life is a learning experience aimed at an ultimate graduation to something much greater – a Godhead that no human can really comprehend – and death . . . is merely a transition to another phase of that learning experience” (91).

²⁷⁸ Bachelard also writes that “[t]he *graft* seems to be a concept essential for understanding human psychology. In my opinion it is the human stamp, the specifying mark of the human imagination. In my view, mankind imagining is the transcendent aspect of *natura naturans*. It is the graft which can truly provide the material imagination with an exuberance of forms, which can transmit the richness and density of matter to formal imagination” (10). Similarly, Hofstadter posits that neither words (the imaginative) nor formal systems (the logical) can provide all truths in “Chapter IX: Mumon and Gödel.”

²⁷⁹ Bachelard sees this dual participation as a blending of contrasts, the logical and creative, “a dual participation of desire and fear, a participation of good and evil, a peaceful participation of black and white” (11-12).

²⁸⁰ Of water’s different symbolic interpretations, Bachelard writes that in it, we find “myths of birth, water in its maternal power, water which gives life in death, beyond death” (147). He also writes of water as a symbol of renewal in his chapter “Clear Waters, Springtime Waters and Running Waters.”

²⁸¹ Bachelard uses the waters found in Poe’s works as examples of this type of water.

²⁸² Bachelard believes that, “At certain times, this impression of dissolution penetrates the most stable, the most optimistic of souls” (91). Furthermore, he writes that, “[w]ater dissolves more completely. It helps us to die completely” (Bachelard 91).

²⁸³ As Freud says, “[t]he ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions” (30).

²⁸⁴ For more on Freud’s theories on the ego, id and superego, see his book *The Ego and the Id*.

²⁸⁵ Accordingly, Bachelard writes that “[p]rofound imagination—material imagination—wants water to have its part in death; water is needed for death to keep its meaning of a journey. From this, we may gather that for such infinite dreams, all souls, whatever the nature of their funerals be, must board boat” (76).

²⁸⁶ For example, when Helio replaces the strings with glass beams, Clara delights in the places her imagination takes her when she “flies,” imagining places she’s never been: “a circus . . . different cities . . . cities like Singapore with wild animals” (Vaz 48).

²⁸⁷ Associating the feeling she has walking on the strings with that of swimming, Clara says, “[b]eing off the ground so much was like swimming, except that it was in air” (Vaz 46).

²⁸⁸ This is seen when he feels Clara’s singing in his heart, when he hangs the strings, and later the beams, through the rafters so Clara can fly, and when he tears the roof off the house so they can experience the night.

²⁸⁹ When the rain begins, Mr. Porter “looked down with a frown at his new black shoes. It was just his luck” (Millhauser 155). Teetering on the edge of the sidewalk, he again carefully avoids the rain, placing “the tips of his shoes on the line of wetness, and bending forward at the waist . . . [he] stretched out his arm farther and farther until he rose on his toes” (Millhauser 156).

²⁹⁰ When he imagines arriving at home and drying out, he pictures himself lying “warm and dry in his bed like a freshly ironed shirt in a drawer” (Millhauser 159).

²⁹¹ As Chapelle notes, “[u]nknownness . . . needs to be experienced, and yes, known on its own terms and in its own right. What is needed for this is a reversal in emphasis. It requires an approach that stresses the awe-inspiring and ‘awe-full’ unknownness in everything, instead of emphasizing only our awesome knowledge and know-how about it. (196)

²⁹² His equations for transforming Clara into an angel include:

$$\frac{W}{\text{music}} + \frac{?}{?} + \frac{?}{?} = \text{angel} \text{ (Vaz 45), and}$$

“*a* = all of a person’s inner air

V^c = velocity + currents of air that are willing

$$\frac{W}{\text{music}} + \frac{a/V^c}{\text{flight}} + \frac{?}{?} = \text{angel} \text{ (Vaz 48).}$$

²⁹³ Similarly, when Clara discovers the missing part of Helio’s equation to turn her into an angel and “had the means of going away, the suspense of waiting for the next rain to envelop and carry her in camouflage from him would be more than he could stand” (Vaz 53).

²⁹⁴ Hofstadter also writes, “A Zen person is always trying to understand more deeply what he is, by stepping more and more out of what he sees himself to be, by breaking every rule and convention which he perceives himself to be chained by—needless to say, including those of Zen itself. Somewhere along this elusive path may come enlightenment. In any case . . . the hope is that by gradually deepening one’s self-awareness, by gradually widening the scope of ‘the system’, one will in the end come to a feeling of being at one with the entire universe” (479).

Chapter VI: Conclusion

²⁹⁵ While Baker is speaking of this function from a postcolonial standpoint, it also applies to non-postcolonial magical realist works.

²⁹⁶ Regarding defamiliarization, Scott Simpkins notes that “[t]o prevent an overwhelming sense of disbelief, magic realists present familiar things in unusual ways. . . .By doing this, magic realists use what the Russian formalists called defamiliarization to radically emphasize common elements of reality, elements that are often present but have become virtually invisible because of their familiarity (145).

²⁹⁷ Similarly, Delicka says “[a]s we, the readers, enter the discourse between the two dimensions of reality, we are challenged to stretch our imagination and to pose questions about our values, ideas and beliefs” (26).

²⁹⁸ Supporting this view, Judith Butler says “[t]he notion of identity carries several burdens: the meaning of culture . . . the problem of historical formation and contextualization; the possibility of agency, social transformation, representability, and recognizability in both linguistic and political terms” (440), and Kenneth J. Gergen comments that “[f]or good or ill, it is the individual as socially constructed that finally informs people’s patterns of action. . . . Relationships make possible the concept of self. Previous possessions of the individual self—autobiography, emotions, and morality—become possessions of relationships. We appear to stand alone, but we are manifestations of relatedness” (146, 170).

²⁹⁹ Zamora is speaking more specifically about the function of ghost in magical realist text; however, as we have seen, this also frequently applies to magical realist works that do not contain ghosts.